Tao of the Reaper
The Tactics, Culture, and Philosophy of Libre Fighting
Scott Babb

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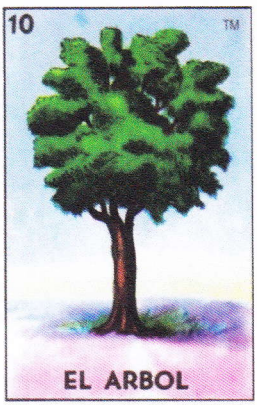
For Paul, my training partner, mentor, and brother.

And for Steve, my other brother, who has been on this long journey with me from the beginning.

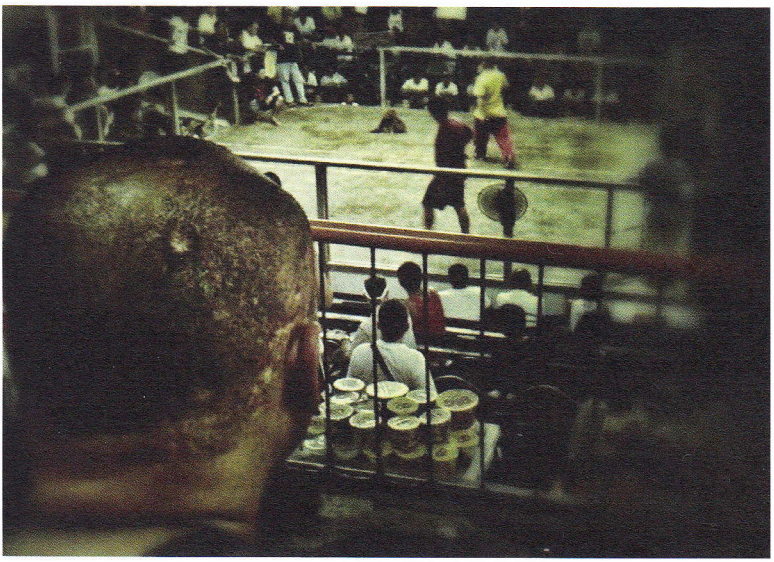
"No sympathy for the devil; keep that in mind. Buy the ticket, take the ride...and if it occasionally gets a little heavier than what you had in mind, well...maybe chalk it off to forced consciousness expansion: Tune in, freak out, get beaten."

— Hunter S. Thompson

PART 1



INTRODUCTION



In Manila, it's called *tupada* or *tigbakay*—illegal cock fighting. The atmosphere is thick, heavy, sticky, and the roar of the rowdy patrons is thunderous. Beyond the foul smell of cigarette smoke, farm dirt, rust, and manure, the feint odor of blood and feathers teases the nostrils.

The bet collectors are referred to as *Kristo*, Tagalog for "Christ", so-named for the way their arms are perpetually extended, taking wagers from all directions. The bleacher seating is filled to capacity, mostly working-class males, making it difficult at times for the *Kristo* to maneuver through the masses. There is something primal in the air, more in line with the Roman colosseum of old than a modern day mixed martial arts bout. Bloodlust, fueled by the promise of a payout, charges the arena.

Inside a crude ring, two manic roosters lash out at each other. Attached to each bird's left leg is a razor-sharp blade. A referee, or *sentensyador*, presides over the action. When blood is drawn, or a combatant succumbs to its wounds, the walls vibrate so hard it feels as if the ceiling may come crashing down.

Below the cockfighting arena is something vaguely similar, but sterile by comparison. The rhythmic rat-tat-tat of speed bags and the rapid whipping sound of fighters skipping rope echoes against the muted cacophony above. The gym is clean, but smells of sweat, and sometimes, vomit. Rather than roosters, two boxers exchange blows in an elevated boxing ring while a handful of fighters look on. The ambitions are bigger here, and the potential payout is much further away. Young men dream of being the next Manny Pacquiao or Gabriel Elorde.

In the back of the gym, off in the corner, there is a nondescript door that would be easy to miss even to one looking for it. Beyond this door, a third type of combat is practiced. Inside this area, there are purpose-built, open roofed chambers about the size of a storage closet, where two combatants with simulated knives tear into each other in a twisted homage to the cockfighting above. The tight confines are designed to force aggression, simulating the intensity of a real world life-and-death struggle. The craft they are honing doesn't come from their indigenous martial arts, which are known the world over for their use of knives, but from an ocean away.

To the south, in Indonesia, the KOPASKA are putting on a demonstration. Special forces are clad in camouflage and black, their faces obscured by balaclavas designed to look like skulls. They perform beneath plumes of purple smoke. With military precision, dozens of KOPASKA execute entry after entry, showcasing various methods of ripping open an opponent's throat with the knife. But outside this high-profile demonstration, on roof tops, in alleys, and in gyms, civilians all over Indonesia are training in the same discipline. This violent art of the blade is even taught to homeless women here—a last line of defense for the forgotten.

In East London it is trained in secret. Knife violence is an ever-looming threat in the urban landscape of the United Kingdom, and anything remotely related to the topic is bound to stir controversy. Therefore, classes aren't advertised and are held far from prying eyes. Sometimes, students will sneak onto elevators, often in the posh South Woodford neighborhood, to conduct close quarters training and sparring sessions.

The notoriously brutal instructor here, along with his equally notorious representative in Germany, traverse Europe, teaching seminars in Bosnia, Croatia, Austria, Finland, France, Lebanon, Poland, and Bulgaria.

On a brisk December night in Mexico City a student of this discipline has just finished class. Leaving the metal-roofed room on the top floor, he makes his way down the stairs and onto the sidewalk below. It's a dangerous city, and a street where bad things are known to happen. This night, two muggers start to close in. He discretely removes his pocket knife and flips it into a point down grip, concealing it along his forearm.

The attackers engage, and the student delivers a linear thrust straight into the larger one's eye, bringing the altercation to a quick but messy end. In the student's discipline, the technique is known as an "eye spike".

Mexico City has become a mecca for this methodology. So much so that the government, at one point, feared it was a cover for an armed revolutionary group and began surveilling classes and seminars in the city, taking photographs of everyone who participated.

Elsewhere in Mexico, a nomadic ex-Cuban special forces operative travels to the most dangerous parts of the country sharing this method. Planting flags and establishing training groups in city after city, town after town. He is known affectionately within these circles as "the Cuban specialist".

The practitioners of this art call themselves The Bastard Children. Largely experienced martial artists who despite years of training never quite fit in anywhere else. Hard men and women who never found an organization to call home. They dress mostly in black and gray, adorning themselves with logos depicting the specter of the grim reaper. Though it's roots are in San Diego, minutes north of the Mexican border, it's branches have spread all over the world. The seeds of this proverbial tree have been planted in over sixteen countries and given rise to over sixty training groups.

The Bastard Children don't consider this a martial art, but rather, they see it as an anti-martial art. A countercultural movement within the martial arts. There is no bowing and no dogma. No set uniform, no belts, no titles that correspond to anything else within the martial arts world. They have developed a means of communication using *lotería* cards that transcends language and cultural barriers. The rites of passage are unique to this discipline, sometimes involving alcohol and pain.

The system has sparked controversy, confusion, and curiosity, but it continues to grow. This is Libre Fighting.

THE USA/MEXICO CONNECTION

Libre Fighting was born in the United States, but it's adolescence took place in Mexico. The basics of the system were structured in San Diego, California. San Diego sits on the USA/Mexico border and is home to the San Ysidro Port of Entry—the busiest land border crossing in the world. On the other side of that crossing is Tijuana, a city that is every bit what one would expect from a third-world country. The people are poor, corruption is rampant, and the threat of violence is ever present. Tijuana is situated in the Baja region of Mexico, a landscape plagued by crime and drug cartels—a place considered to be one of the most dangerous places in the world to work in law enforcement. This reality was what brought Libre Fighting to Mexico.

In 2007 a state police officer was abducted by cartel members. Unknown to his captors, the officer had a pocket knife with him and was able to lash out at his at abductors in a bold attempt to escape. Sadly, the officer was gunned down. The incident, however, prompted members of Mexican law enforcement to seek out a street-based method of knife combat that would be suited for the realities their teams faced. This was how Libre Fighting came to Mexico.

In the years that followed Mexico became a proving ground for Libre Fighting, as agents trained in the discipline implemented its teachings in real world life-and-death altercations. Each incident brought feedback that helped refine and streamline the system, molding it into the methodology it is today.

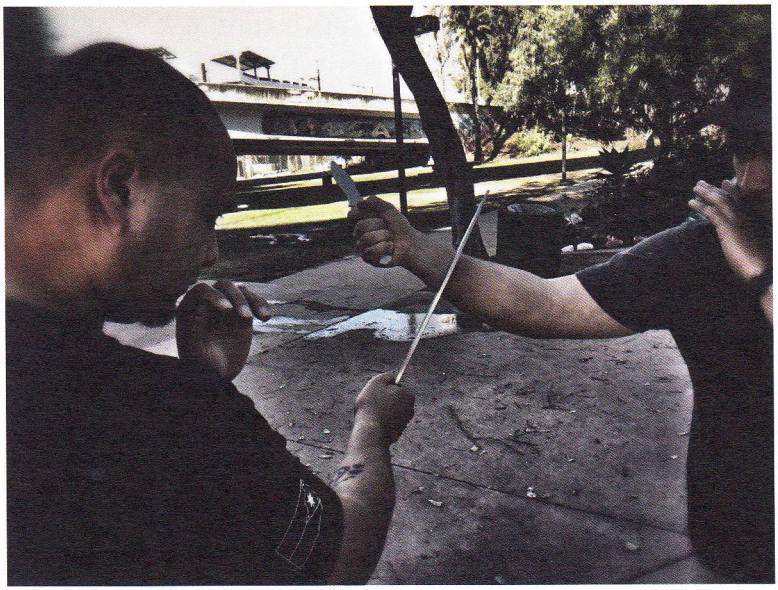
Libre Fighting could not have evolved into the system it is without the geographical advantages of having the first-world resources of a major United States city situated next to a third-world region plagued by violence. As martial arts experts from all over the world made pilgrimages to train in Libre Fighting in San Diego, and add their own expertise to the system, these evolutions were concurrently being put to the test in Baja. Being less than an hour from one another, these two dynamics facilitated the creation of this formidable, street-tested system of knife combat.

ENDEMIC CONSIDERATIONS

Many historical knife-based martial arts were designed around the use of heavy agricultural blades. Furthermore, they were developed in tropical environments where very light clothing was worn. Conversely, Libre Fighting was initially developed in the United States. A region where one is far more likely to be carrying a small folding knife, and where the weather often dictates multiple layers of heavy fabrics.

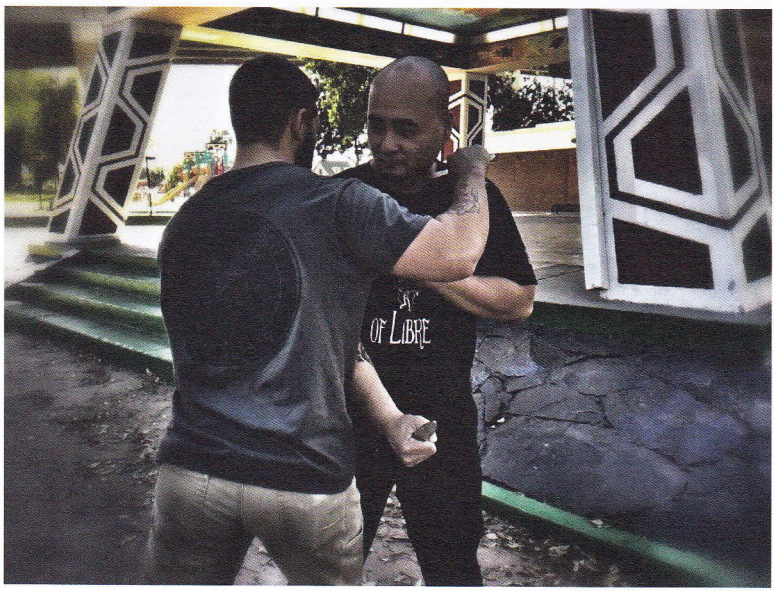
Why is this important?

A heavy agricultural blade can conceivably hack through an opponent's bare arm. This concept of attacking the opponents weapon wielding limb is called "defanging the snake" in Filipino martial arts.



But now let's replace that blade with a pocket knife and put the opponent in a leather jacket.

People tend to radically overestimate the cutting power of a pocket knife against clothing. In the above situation, there is a very real chance that the blade wouldn't even reach the opponent's flesh. Even if a cut is made, there is no guarantee that the small knife will do crippling damage to the opponent's limb. Many people have sustained such injuries in violent altercations and not had their limb or grip affected in any significant way during the fight. Not only does this make it a wasted motion, but from a tactical standpoint it leaves one in a very vulnerable position. As we see in the following picture, an aggressive, untrained opponent barreling forward will incidentally smother the weapon hand, while keeping his own blade in play.



Such considerations have played an important role in structuring Libre Fighting. The majority of bladed systems are highly effective in the cultures in which they were developed. However, western culture presents unique conditions which must be addressed and adapted to. Aside from the knife you are likely to carry and clothing you might be wearing, there are other issues that must be dealt with.

Among these dynamics are the following:

How Untrained Fighters Attack

How Untrained Fighters React to an Attack

Dealing with Low Light Conditions

Confronting Multiple Opponents

The Types of Weapons the Opponent is Likely to Have

Working in Confined Spaces

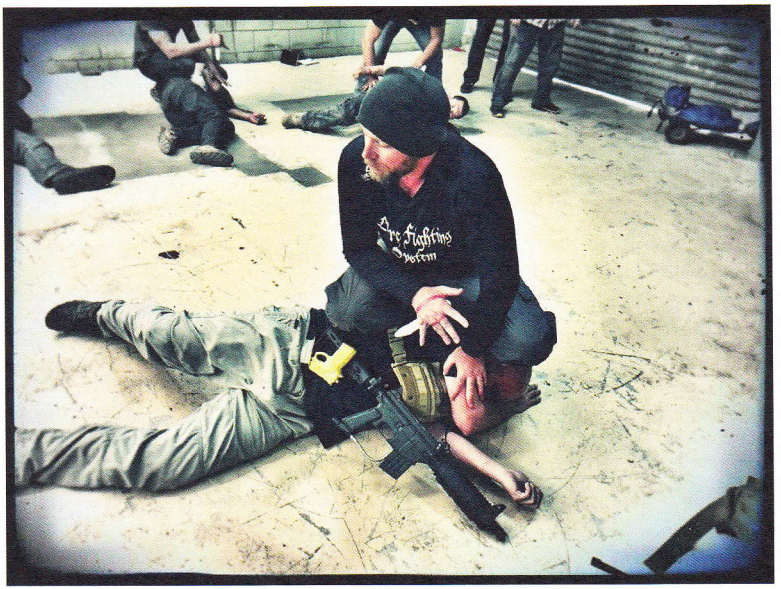
Improvised Weapons

Another important factor to be aware of is how people tend to hold knives. In some parts of the world people gravitate towards holding the blade with the point down. In parts of rural Mexico and South America, for example, it's common in knife-on-knife altercations for combatants to fight one on one, point down, with a jacket wrapped around the opposite forearm for protection. Contrary to what is seen in the United States, these types of duels do play out in these removed locations. In those regions, Libre Fighting would be trained with this in mind. Certain techniques would be emphasized more, and others might even be omitted completely. New techniques may even be developed to counter this style of fighting.

Here in the United States, males tend to hold the knife in the standard "hammer" grip (the point facing up), and use the opposite hand to latch onto the opponent's shirt or behind his head while stabbing. Curiously, females in the United States are far more apt than men to use a point down grip.

Understanding the local culture in which one moves, and the way that culture employs weapons and commits violent attacks is imperative to the study of Libre Fighting.

"STOPPING POWER" AND THE KNIFE



If you've attended a Libre Fighting seminar at any point in recent years you've probably heard the instructor ask the question, "has anyone here ever been slashed or stabbed?"

It's an inquiry a Libre Fighting trainer will almost always make, and there are several reasons we often choose to lead with that question when opening a seminar. Among those reasons is a purely selfish one — we ask for our own personal research.

Generally, there are at least one or two present who have faced a blade, sometimes more if it's a larger group. The follow-up question, once we have identified those who have in fact been cut or stabbed, is "did you realize you'd been stabbed at the time?"

The answer is almost always "no." The same goes for those who have been cut. And of the very small minority that did realize they'd tasted steel at the time, it was because they saw blood, not because they felt the injury.

When asked if they felt themselves significantly hindered by the wounds they had received while fighting, the answer is almost always "no." When stabbed in the lung they may note that they felt winded and unable to catch their breath, but in the moment they just thought they had been hit hard. Most other wounds barely registered at all.

Conventional wisdom holds that a slash to the opponent's forearm will render his weapon hand useless — however this is a highly optimistic outlook. Slashing the underside of the forearm can disable the arm, if the major tendons are severed. However, evolution has dictated that these major tendons be buried beneath more superficial tendons to protect them from such injuries. So it's possible, but it will take a very solid, very deep cut. Slashes to the back of the forearm may actually produce the opposite result, one may find it impossible to open their hand or drop the weapon!

Why then, is this tactic so common in the world of knife combatives? The answer is because most blade work stems from cultures that use heavy agricultural blades capable of doing tremendous amounts of damage — perhaps even severing a limb. However, the blades that we use in modern western culture are smaller and lighter, generally producing wounds that are much less severe.

The point is that while a small knife is obviously a very lethal tool, it doesn't function well in slowing down an attacker. The attacker may die, but he will be able to fight like hell in the long moments between receiving life-ending injuries and succumbing to blood loss.

Those with a keen eye, who view our online videos, may have noticed an evolution in recent years in the way we train. This evolution is a response to the reality of the knife's limited stopping power.

Evolution #1

It would be morbid to use the words "fortunate" or "privileged', so I will just say that we have been in the "unusual" position of being able to get a steady stream of real world feedback. We have had the opportunity to work with military, law enforcement, security, and special forces groups all over the world. Groups that put our teachings into action on a fairly regular basis and report back to us on what has transpired. This feedback has shown us that there is one injury inflicted with the knife that in all but one instance quickly incapacitated the opponent. It's not a lethal target, *per se*, but it will impede an opponent while lethal damage is inflicted or while they bleed out. That target is the eyes. A stab, slash, score, or pluck to the opponent's eyes will generally quickly impede the opponent. As a result, we have stressed attacking the eyes as a key tactic. We have developed many tactics for taking the opponents eye, and train these in every class. Incidentally, taking an opponent's eye also has the added advantage of giving them a "blind side" in which you can press your attack.

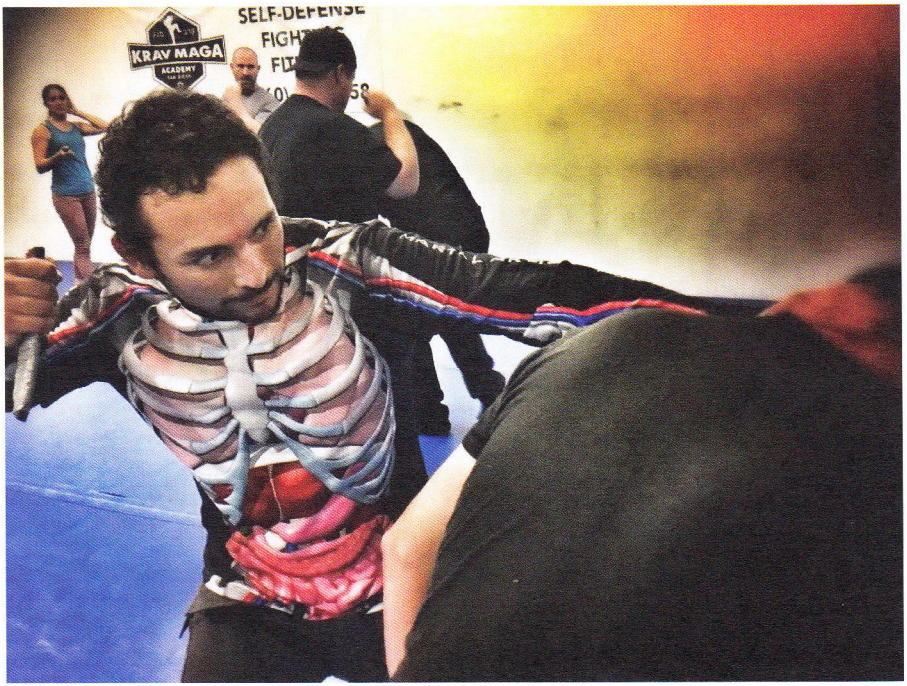
Evolution #2

While a blade may not be effective in slowing down an opponent, the jarring effect of a punch, slap, eye whip, eye gouge, or hammer-fist can stun or disorient the them. Adding these solid shots into a bladed combination can allow one to produce lethal damage with the blade

while at the same time staggering them with the impact of the empty hand.

Hence, you will see in Libre Fighting's current evolution a strong emphasis placed on attacking the eyes and striking with the empty hand. The knife is a dangerous tool, especially in trained hands, but it is important to understand its limitations to be fully effective with it.

PRINCIPLES OF LIBRE



1. Libre is about attacking. It is not about countering or trying to move around an opponent's defense—it is about tearing through the opponent's defense.

2. Strategy in Libre involves reading an opponent's stance, guard, and position, and exploiting it. The practitioner also utilizes footwork, feints, and line-of-sight to break through the opponent's defense.

3. Defense in Libre comes through utilizing footwork to control distance, evade, bait, and offset the opponent. Blocks and/or

parries are rarely used. If you are close enough to be cut or stabbed, you should already be attacking.

4. Libre isn't about dueling; it is about fighting. Libre doesn't try to pick an opponent apart; it is intended to rip them apart in the fastest and most violent ways at the practitioner's disposal. That is where the term "Libre Fighting" comes from. It isn't a traditional martial art, it isn't a "system" or "style". It is, at its root, simply "fighting."

5. Libre doesn't limit itself to "techniques." Students study ways to use anything around to their advantage. This includes using one's clothing, or the opponent's clothing, to blind, choke, control, or distract the opponent. Using whatever is within reach as a projectile. Spitting, biting, pinching, hair pulling, and head butting. Smashing the opponent's skull into a wall, curb, or table. Libre practitioners learn to improvise to prevail.

6. Libre is not geared towards the use of heavier agricultural blades. It is geared towards the use of a common folding knife that one might carry on the street. That is why heavy emphasis is placed on attacking only vital or crippling areas. The smaller "street blade" simply is not capable of causing tremendous amounts of damage as easily as a heavy agricultural blade. That is why no superfluous cuts or stabs are used. Every strike with the "street blade" must do as much damage as possible.

7. Libre is meant to grow. It is meant to complement whatever style of fighting the user carries. Libre should ultimately mold to the individual, the individual should not mold to Libre. Practitioners are encouraged to make Libre their own, to use what they have in conjunction with Libre.

8. Libre always takes into consideration the indigenous use of knives wherever it is practiced, and prepares for those conditions and circumstances.

9. Libre trains for situations in which a knife assault is likely to occur. This includes extensive low light training, training against multiple attackers, and working in confined spaces.

10. Libre stresses deploying a knife from a concealed grip whenever possible. There is no tactical justification for showing an opponent you are armed unless there is a chance it can deescalate the situation.

LIBRE FIGHTING DEFINED

It has been said that Libre Fighting is a bit of a Rorschach Test for martial artists. People familiar with violence and combat arts look at Libre Fighting and project their own assumptions and interpretations onto it. It has been compared to various Filipino martial arts, western boxing, different kung fu systems, prison fighting, and an assortment of knife fighting systems from around the world. To varying degrees, all of these assumptions have merit. Libre Fighting has drawn from many sources, and has been influenced by many hands over the years. It is important, however, to realize that this methodology is more than the sum of its parts. To grasp the mechanics of Libre Fighting is only the first step towards understanding it as a whole.

Libre Fighting is, at its core, a reflection. It's an echo. It is a systemized reaction to bladed violence as it happens in western culture. Libre takes the realities of how knife attacks happen in our society and works backwards to find solutions. Often, these solutions come in the form of interpretations of older martial arts. Just as often, answers are found in adopting perpetrator's methodologies and refining them. Yes, Libre Fighting learns from utilizing criminal tactics.

From a strictly mechanical standpoint, Libre Fighting is a system that draws from both boxing and Filipino martial arts footwork and angling. It heavily favors stabbing over slashing, and is geared towards extreme close quarters work that draws from the careful study of prison knifings. Techniques stem from a diverse number of systems and styles, with a large degree of unique innovation as well.

Footage of our raw sparring sessions has sparked controversy; with some people claiming that such close-range exchanges are risky in the real world. Real knife combat, however, is always risky. Too often knife sparring appears as if the combatants are dueling on the French

countryside. Hanging back, taking swipes at each other, lunging in with long range stabs. But this is not how knife violence plays out in our modern society.

There is no "dueling" in Libre, because there is no "dueling" in modern Western culture. Libre is down and dirty, messy, up-close fighting. In Western culture, knife violence does not occur in a dueling format. In the incredibly unlikely scenario that an opponent draws a knife and begins to tentatively engage from a dueling range it would be prudent to remove oneself from the situation rather than risking the criminal, civil, and psychological consequences of taking a life and perhaps also sustaining crippling or life-ending injuries. In the real world, when someone wants to kill with a knife, they attack with murderous intent. Knife sparring that looks like a fencing match with tiny swords does not prepare someone for the reality of this type of knife assault.

To prepare students for the reality to bladed combat, we start them sparring in a storage closet, with nowhere to run. It's kill or be killed. This is how Libre Fighting is pressure tested—in a violent, uncontrolled, enclosed environment. If a technique or tactic doesn't hold up there, it isn't a part of Libre. This type of sparring is called a "blender session" and will be covered in detail later.

Moving beyond the nuts and bolts, Libre Fighting is a mindset. It is a system that intentionally taps into man's primal nature, explores it, develops and refines it. The mind of the practitioner, in life-threatening situations, becomes one of a controlled predator. Unlike some traditional martial arts, the practitioner does not seek to achieve a flow or balance with their opponent, they seek to rip them apart with a sophisticated methodology of violence and manipulation that is both physical and psychological.

WEAPON SELECTION

"I'm an artist, and if you give me a tuba, I'll bring you something out of it." —John Lennon

First and foremost, study the laws regarding knives and the carrying of them in your area and obey those laws carefully. Second, keep in mind that just because it may be legal to carry a specific type of knife, that doesn't always mean it's a particularly good idea to carry that style of knife. If your knife looks like it was designed by a Klingon, no matter how justified you may have been in using it, a jury may have a hard time believing that you weren't out looking for an excuse to put in into somebody.

Everybody loves to debate knife preferences—the best locking mechanism, the most functional blade design, the most skilled maker. Entire forums exist with thousands upon thousands of posts on the

subject. In fact, there is a whole subculture of people who collect fighting knives, who have no idea how to use them, and no interest in learning.

There's an expression guitarists use: Tone is in your fingers. Meaning that a skilled player can make a low-quality instrument sound great. But a great guitar will still sound poor in an unskilled musician's hands. It's the same with a knife. In the right hands a ten-dollar kitchen knife will do more damage than a four hundred-dollar tactical knife in the wrong hands. In fact, in some parts of the world the preferred knife of Libre Fighting practitioners is a common fruit knife. These "disposable" knives have been used by Libre Fighting practitioners effectively in the street on more than one occasion. Not only did these little knives serve their owners well, in testing on pig carcasses they performed better than many purpose-built fighting knives that cost hundreds and even thousands of dollars. Make no mistake, cost does not in any way automatically dictate the quality of a knife in terms of its functionality as a weapon.

The bottom line is the perfect knife isn't going to mean a thing to you when someone is shoving an icepick into your stomach or has just slashed you open with a broken bottle and you suddenly find yourself fighting for your life. The only considerations you will have is that your weapon is sharp enough to cut, pointy enough to stab, and sturdy enough not to fail.

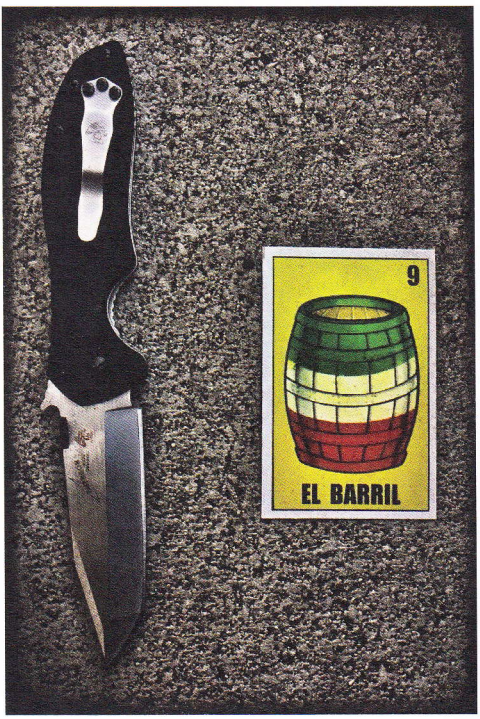
If you are new to knife work, eventually it will be practical for you to pick up a serious knife—when you have a few years under your belt and have established your preferences. You could pick one up now if deep down you just want to be a collector. But if you want to be proficient in the use of the blade, put your mind on your work.

Decide what your goals are now, and be honest with yourself. Establish what you really want out of exploring the knife culture and work from there. If you want to collect, there is nothing wrong with that.

If you want skill, focus on your training first and invest in a high-end knife two-years from now when you know what you're looking for.

There are several categories of knives to choose from and ideally a practitioner should be comfortable working with any of them.

Fixed Blades: With no moving parts to fail, the fixed blade is obviously the superior knife. However, fixed blades are not legal to carry in all areas, and even where they are, if called upon to use one, you may have a hard time explaining to a jury of your peers why you felt compelled to carry such a weapon on you. Even when you are well within your rights to carry a fixed blade knife, you can expect to be engaged by law enforcement and looked upon suspiciously by others wherever you go. Typically, fixed blade knives are the blade of choice for military personnel.



Folders: Folding knives are easy to carry, don't draw much attention, and come in all shapes and sizes. The drawback to a folding knife is that they take longer to deploy, and many require two-hands to open. In many jurisdictions, knives that can be opened with one hand are illegal to carry. In places where it is legal, knives that can be opened with one hand via a pocket catch, thumb stud, or cam should always be the first choice.

Beyond that, it is best to look past the sexier features such as blade style and focus on these more functional considerations.

How reliable is the locking mechanism? By far the biggest risk involved with carrying a folding knife is a failure of the locking mechanism when you need it most. This should be your primary concern with any folder you carry.

Does this look "tactical"? If so, find a more mundane and boring looking knife. A plain looking knife can pierce flesh just as readily as one that looks like it was designed to kill, and it won't raise as many eyebrows.

Is it comfortable to carry? A bulky, heavy, or awkwardly shaped pocket knife will quickly become a hassle to carry, and sooner or later you will likely find yourself deciding it's not worth the inconvenience

of carrying it. A weapon does no good if it's not within reach when needed.

Look for a knife you can clip into your pocket and forget about.

Improvised and Available Implements: It may not be legal to carry a knife where you are, you may choose not to, or you may be in a situation that doesn't make carrying one practical. If this is the case, keeping an eye out for available stabbing implements is important. If you are in a bar, for example, there will likely be at least one knife behind the bar for cutting limes. Restaurants may have flimsy steak knives available for patrons. A home or commercial kitchen will likely be filled with knives. In an office metal pens, scissors, letter openers, and box cutters are common. In any kind of workshop there will be a treasure trove of tool that's can be utilized as stabbing devices. A flathead screwdriver, found in any tool box, can do a respectable amount of damage in the right hands. Opportunities for finding available weapons wherever you may be are limitless.

Disposable Knives: These are commonly utilized by travelers who cannot carry knives with them on flights or across borders. Once they reach their destination they simply pick up a cheap knife to carry with them while they are in town, then throw it away before returning home.

The favored disposable knife is the common fruit knife. A tiny, slightly hooked blade that in our testing does tremendous amounts of damage and has outperformed purpose-built fighting knives that cost hundreds of dollars in organic mediums research.

Shanks: When all else fails, any number of common items can be molded and shaped into stabbing weapons. Ingenious prisoners all over the world have been doing this since the first incarceration. Scraps of plastic or metal, tooth brushes, combs, chopsticks, and countless other items can easily be molded into weapons.

KNIFE VIOLENCE RESEARCH

Presented here are the results of a study of actual footage of real world knife attacks. These statistics are meant to illuminate the conditions under which knife violence plays out in actual attacks.

A Few Notes: The sample size was relatively small: twenty-five videos. The videos were from all over the world, so endemic knife use in specific areas may be different (for example, some cultures will use icepick grip for more frequently). Videos were selected based on video clarity, with secondary emphasis placed on being able to see the pre-attack moments and the aftermath.

Pre-Fight Dynamics and Demographics

Victim:
Male: 68%
Female: 24%
Male and female: 4%
Unknown: 4%

Time of Day:
Day time: 36%
Night time: 48%
Undetermined: 16%

Inside or Outside:
Indoors: 56%
Outdoors: 44%

Confined Space or Open Space:
Confined space: 88%
Open space: 12%

Initial Attack Dynamics

Displaying Knife:
Knife shown: 8%
Knife concealed: 88%
Unknown 4%

Range of Initial attack:
Less than three feet: 84%
More than 3 feet: 12%
Unknown: 4%

Opening Attack Directed To:
Torso/abdomen: 76%
Neck/face: 20%
Lower body: 0%
Unknown: 4%

Attack Initiated From:
Front 68%
Back 16%
Side 12%
Unknown: 4%

Opening Attack:
Backhand: 4%. (Only happened in icepick grip, attacker to the side of the victim)
Forehand/straight: 60%
Overhead: 16%. (Always in icepick grip)
Underhand: 0%
Slash: 4%
Unknown: 4%
Holding knife to victim's throat: 4%
Slashing victims throat from behind: 8%

Attack Begins:
(Time between initiating interaction, does not include lingering near the victim)
Within 5 seconds of contacting the victim: 68%
5-30 seconds of approaching the victim: 16%
After more than 30 seconds of approaching victim: 4%
Unable to determine: 12%

Dynamics of the Altercation

Grip:
Icepick: 12%
Hammer: 76%
Both: 12%. (Grip switched in altercation)

Number of Successful Stabs/Slashes:
0: 4%
1: 12%
2-5: 32%
6-10: 32%
10-20: 20%
20+: 0%

Ground:
(During violence, not including in aftermath. This could be the result of a strike, takedown, sweep, or simply tripping.)
Only victim went to the ground: 32%
Only attacker went to the ground: 0%
Both went to the ground: 4%
Neither went to the ground: 64%

Attacker Used:
Stab: 80%
Slash: 8%
Stab and slash: 12%

Numbers:
One on one: 64%
More than one victim: 24%
More than one attacker: 8%
More than one attacker and victim: 4%

Grabbing:
Attacker grabbed the victim: 60%
Attacker did not grab the victim: 40%

Post-Mortem

Conclusion:
Attacker subdues or kills victim and lingers: 4%
Attacker strikes and flees in less than 5 seconds: 32%
Attacker breaks off after attack of more than 5 seconds: 40%
Victim escapes: 12%
Victim fends off opponent unarmed: 8%
Victim disarms opponent: 0%
Victim fends off opponent with improvised weapon: 0%
Victim fends off opponent with purpose-built weapon: 4%

Duration of Engagement:
Under 10 seconds: 48%
10-30 seconds: 44%
31-60 seconds: 4%
61-120 seconds: 0%
121+ seconds: 4%

Size of Knife:
Under 6": 48%
Over 6": 44%
Unable to determine: 8%

Knife Produced:
At onset of attack: 80%
During attack: 16%
Unknown: 4%

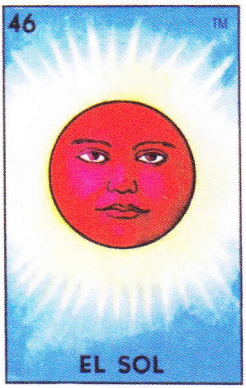
Provoker:
Knifer: 84%
Victim: 4%
3rd party: 12%

Witnesses:
Witnesses not present: 36%
Witnesses do nothing: 44%
Witnesses intervene: 16%
Witnesses present but did not see the attack: 4%

Looking at these numbers, we can begin to see trends forming that show the ways in which knife violence is mostly likely to occur. Combat is always fluid and unpredictable, but certain patterns begin to emerge when CCTV footage is examined closely. We can determine that the most common environment a knife attack is likely to occur in would be an enclosed space, indoors, after dark. We see that the attack will probably be initiated from the front, at a range of less than three feet, within five seconds of initial contact, opening with a forehand stab to the torso or abdomen. Finally, we see that the attack will last less than thirty seconds and that it will be the attacker who dictates when the assault ends.

These are the considerations that Libre Fighting starts with and the scenarios that we train for.

PART 2



OFFENSIVE ATTRIBUTES

Uneducated fighters tend to focus on only two aspects of offense — speed and power. These are the two easiest attributes to recognize. There are, however, several elements of an effective offense and they are all of equal importance.

Speed - Boxing commentator Jim Lampley once said, "If you are going to bet on one commodity, bet on speed." Speed gets your strikes in, it gets them there first, it flusters, frustrates, and offsets your opponent. It is extremely difficult to counter a speed advantage, though it can be done through use of timing, angles, and footwork.

Power – This may be the most under-appreciated aspect of knife combat. While it is true that it requires very little power to puncture flesh with a blade, power does play an important role in other aspects of knife combat. Powerful strikes can crash through an opponent's defense, the force can disrupt an opponent's balance, the sheer intent can intimidate, and the impact can also do secondary damage by cracking ribs, crushing

testicles, or otherwise doing any kind of damage a hammer-fist strike could do on its own.

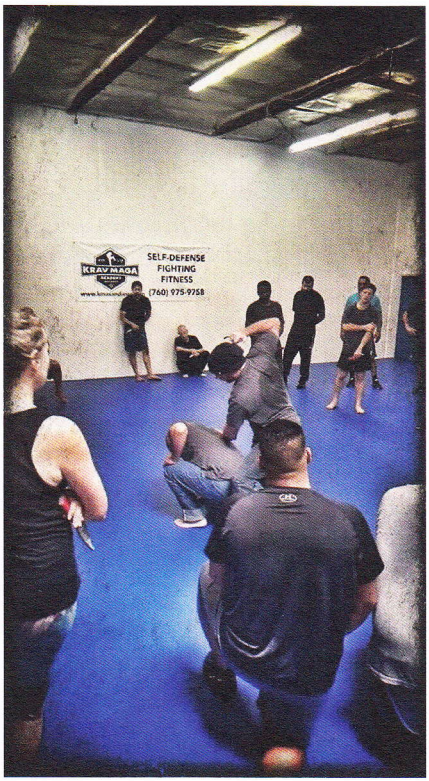
Accuracy - There are many places where you can cut or stab a person to hurt, blind, or kill with a knife. Arteries, organs, and eyes provide little room for error and are hard to hit under duress. A matter of a centimeters can make all the difference.

Timing - No aspect of combat is more overlooked or under-appreciated than timing. Timing lets you catch the opponent at the right moment, as they are moving in, when they are exposed, or when they are reaching out with their own strike. Timing will not only counter an opponent's superior speed, but it will let you catch them at the moment when they are most exposed.

Range – Mastering range makes all the difference when it comes to defense. Knowing the opponent's reach, your own, and being able to move in and out of striking range with ease is only the first step. One must also learn how to bridge the gap to smother the opponent's weapon hand, to be able to close quickly and impact the opponent with your own body mass to drive them into a wall or barrier, or be able to step back to safety when you are out of position. This is where footwork comes into play.

Technique - Sloppy technique diminishes your power, pulls you off balance, and leaves you exposed to counters. Being able to strike properly in controlled training exercises is great, but maintaining that technique in sparring and on the street is what really counts. I would encourage you to film your sparring sessions and review your technique as often as possible. You'll be surprised how often you'll find your skill slipping under duress, especially when you start to fatigue.

Combinations - Being able to let your attacks go in flurries is essential to becoming a skilled fighter. Most martial artists, of every discipline, practice combinations extensively, yet when it comes time to spar many people still only fire one shot at a time. One shot rarely gets the job done. It is essential that you become comfortable firing off combinations not only when working against a static opponent in drills, but when sparring as well. Letting your strikes go requires confidence, more than the untrained fighters of the world realize. Every strike you throw leaves you exposed, especially if all of the aforementioned attributes are not in place. But if you are throwing fast, accurate, powerful strikes, well-timed and from the proper range, and your technique is spot on, you will quickly find the confidence required to put together devastating combinations.



THE LIBRE MIND

"He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man."
—Samuel Johnson

Libre Fighting can certainly be imitated. The movements can be emulated, the stylized elements can be duplicated. Someone can come to a seminar, get a DVD set, and put something together that in a vague sense resembles Libre Fighting— in fact, people have already done this.

Like a bad photocopy, these duplicates are never quite the same as the original. Their students may perform the mechanical movements, but it's hollow. The intensity isn't there. The mindset is wrong, and it shows.

If you try to teach or learn Libre Fighting as you would a traditional martial art, it simply won't come together. A student may have all the movements, but they won't have the "edge" that Libre requires. They will have a body without a heartbeat. All the parts are there, but there is nothing to bring it to life.

The Libre Mind is what separates true Libre from those who imitate it, and it took years to develop a methodology to instill this mindset into Libre practitioners. Like everything else in the combative arts, this is a

process. There is an order to it, a method in which it is developed. The process involves alternately mastering the mechanics and applying these movements with varying levels of intensity, simulating situations in which real world violence plays out, then adding stress modifiers such as shock collars, stage blood, low light conditions, and injury simulations.

Once the proper mindset has been achieved, the student will move differently. There will be more urgency in achieving entry, more intensity in inflicting damage.

Libre Fighting instructors will often introduce this mindset asking students to go to a very primal, very predatory place, explaining that Libre Fighting is an aggressive system, and it is going to take them to a place where they shouldn't be entirely comfortable. Blade work deals with taking human life, something that nobody should be comfortable with. If one starts to feel a bit disturbed by the training, that's a good thing.

Libre is designed to bring out the predator in the student very early on, but not to develop psychopaths. If a student has been trained properly, they should have a deep understanding of the violent nature of edged weapons work, but also a deep respect for the damage that a knife can do. If someone has a true understanding of bladed combat dynamics, including the horrors of real-world knife violence, along with the moral and psychological issues intertwined with the use of lethal force, the last thing they should ever want to do is put a blade into someone. Understanding how fragile the human body can be should make one value life more, not less.

Over time, this mindset becomes a switch that can be turned on and off. Though alert and aware of one's surroundings, one should be able to calmly go about their life without a latent paranoia dancing around in the back of their mind or any hint of residual hostility dictating their mood or behavior. But if called upon to fight for their life, a primal

instinct should be triggered. Not reckless, but not in any way passive. A controlled predator. A tiger ready to lash out. A bird of prey ready to drop from the sky and snatch its target away. And when ready to strike, they should become a hungry animal methodically taking down its next meal.

It is easy to become desensitized. If you find yourself becoming comfortable with the idea of violence, or developing some kind of knife fetish, or if you are suddenly willing to pull a knife on someone at the drop of a hat, it's time to take a break and step away from the knife work.

THE CONCEPTU METHODOLOGY

Conceptu is a revolutionary new structure in which to train the mechanics of Libre Fighting. Historically, Libre Fighting has been taught in a similar manner to most other combative systems. The material has been presented as a series of techniques and concepts, with each new movement in the curriculum building on the last.

While effective, this manner of learning dictates that the student invests time and energy in memorizing many similar techniques and the names of these techniques, while providing relatively little room for personal interpretation. The Conceptu Method of teaching both shrinks the curriculum down to a manageable format, while providing limitless options and paths for the practitioner to explore. More importantly, however, this method teaches the student how to think in terms of concepts and tactics rather that simply executing prearranged sequences.

Numbering Systems in Combative Arts

Those with even a cursory knowledge of boxing are familiar with a one-two. The one being a jab, the two being a straight right hand. While this is the most recognizable numbering system in boxing, different boxing schools use different numbering systems. Cus D'mato's Peek-a-Boo style, for example, uses the following numbering system:

1. Left Hook to Head
2. Straight Right to Head/Right Hook to Head
3. Left Uppercut

4. Right Uppercut
5. Left Hook to Body
6. Right Hook to Body
7. Jab to Head
8. Jab to Body

Filipino Martial Arts use a similar method, though rather than utilizing specific attacks in conjunction with numbers, angles of attack are used instead. In most systems of Filipino martial arts, a number one strike would be an attack that moves in a downward angle, starting from the striker's high right side and moving to the striker's left side. With this angle-based numbering system, a number one strike could either be a forehand strike with the right hand, or a backhand strike with the left. Every Filipino martial art has its own numbering system, ranging from as few as two angles, to as many as sixty-four, with twelve being the most common.

Conceptu also utilizes a numbering system, but rather than numbering specific strikes as we see in boxing, or angles of attack as we see in Filipino martial arts, Conceptu numbers concepts. For example, a number one in the Conceptu methodology is any method of attacking the opponent's eyes to impair their vision. A number two in the Conceptu methodology is any stabbing or ripping attack to the throat or body. Therefore, a one-two in Libre would involve attacking the opponent's eye, followed by a stab to the neck or body. A two-one would involve a stab to the neck or body followed by an attack to the eye. The theory behind this approach is to saddle students with fewer techniques to remember, to give them the freedom to make it their own, while still working within the framework of the system.

A breakdown of the Conceptu numbering system:

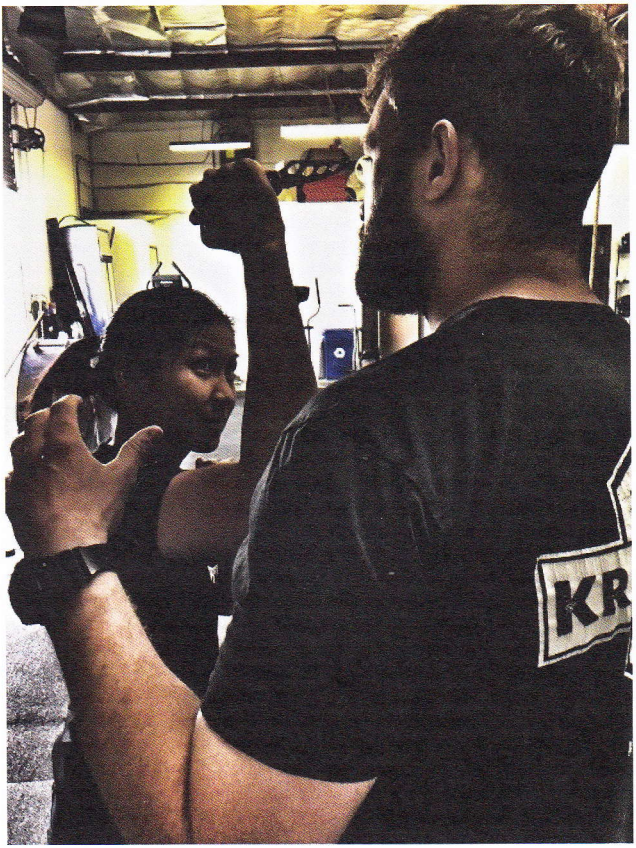
1. Eye Attacks
2. Stabbing and Ripping
3. Pendulum

4. Collapsing
5. Using Walls
6. Clothing Manipulations
7. Base Disruptions
8. Off Hand Strikes/Knife Passing

Obviously, it would be impossible to present the entire curriculum in a single volume. That being the case, we will touch on each of these eight elements and provide examples of ways in which they can be connected, to present a broader view of how the system comes together.

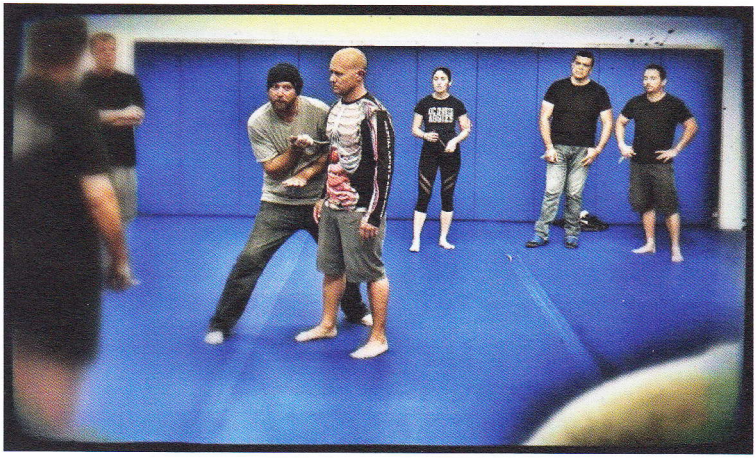
First, we will discuss the eight elements.

ELEMENT 1: Eye Attacks



Attacking the opponent's eyes is a top priority in the Libre Fighting approach. Attacking tendons produces unpredictable results. Even slashing or puncturing arteries will not likely incapacitate an attacker right away. However, sticking a piece of metal into a person's eye will both immediately and reliably impede them while leaving more vital targets exposed.

ELEMENT 2: Neck and Body Attacks



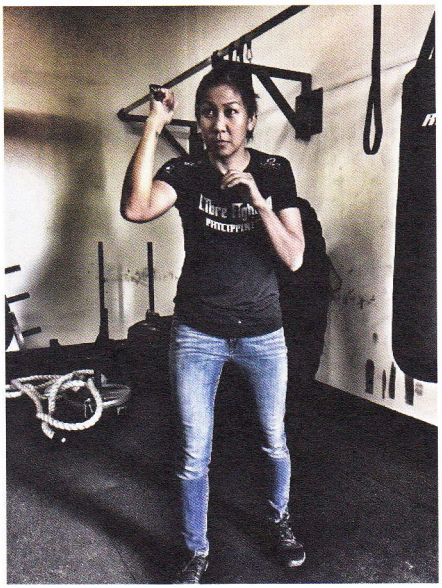
Libre Fighting does not view bladed combat as surgery, but as butchery. The Libre approach is to attack major targets that produce more consistent results. These targets break down into three categories.

1. Arterial System *(Examples: carotid, brachial, subclavian, femoral)*
2. Respiratory System *(Examples: windpipe, lungs)*
3. Organs *(Examples: liver, kidneys)*

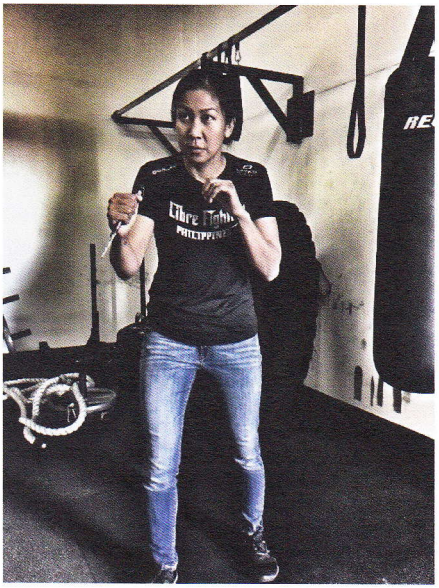
Focus is placed on spreading out the damage and getting as many of these systems failing as possible, in order to bring the opponent down quickly.

ELEMENT 3: The Pendulum

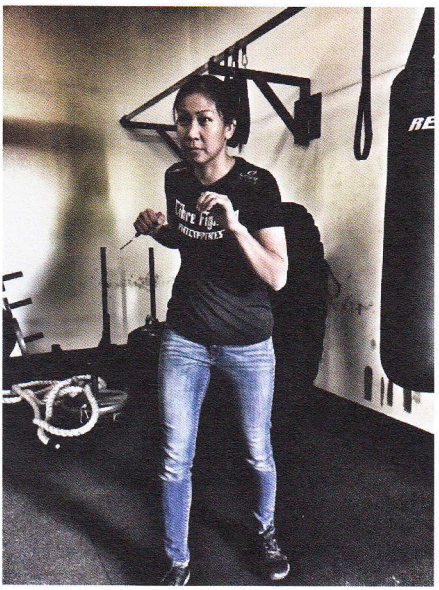
The Pendulum is a scooping motion made with the blade, intended to clear an opponent's arm out of the way. This can be used to clear a block when an attack is intercepted, or to pull an opponent's arm out of the way when they are covering up. When the blade is held in a Scythe Grip (point down, edge facing in) this motion will cut and/or fillet the opponent's arm.



The practitioner starts with the blade chambered on the right side.



The practitioner then drops the blade straight down onto the opponent's arm, cutting into it.

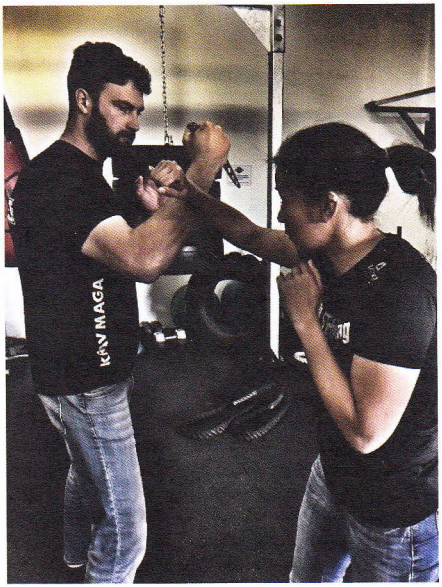


The blade is then scooped to the practitioner's right side, filleting the opponent's arm and clearing it out of the way.

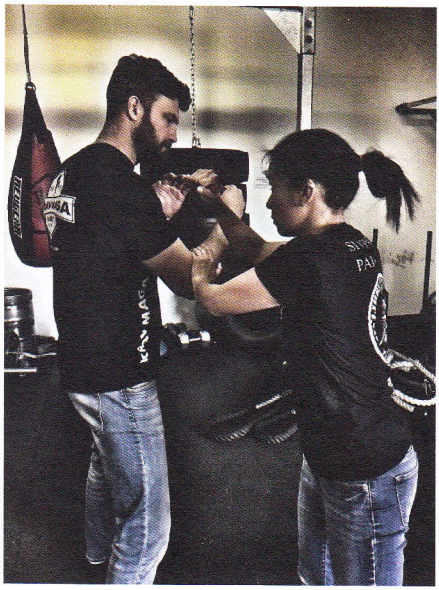
ELEMENT 4: Collapsing

Collapsing involves the practitioner using their empty hand to clear and opponent's block, check, flinch response, or guard out of the way to press the attack. With collapsing, the opponent's impediment is moved towards their center-line to collapse their defensive structure.

EXAMPLE: Right Hand Block

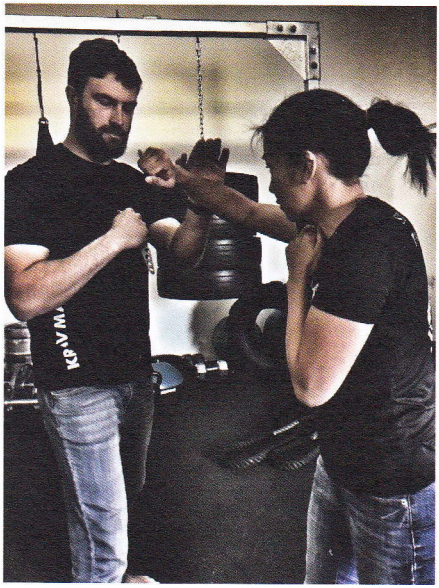


The practitioner enters with a stab to the opponent's throat, but the attack is impeded by the opponent's right arm.

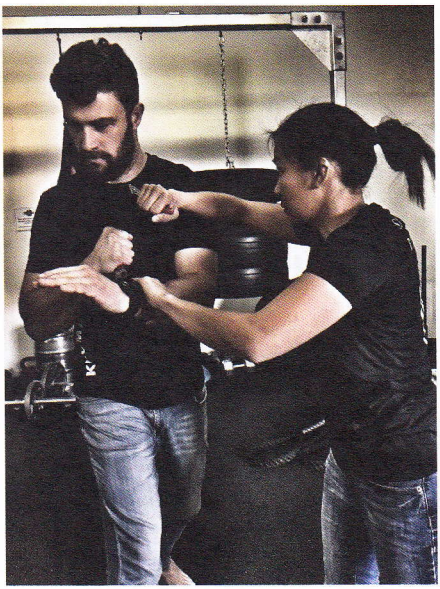


The practitioner slaps the opponent's arm down and towards his centerline, clearing a path to his throat.

EXAMPLE: Left Hand Block



The practitioner enters with a stab to the opponent's throat, but the attack is impeded by the opponent's left hand.



The practitioner pushes the opponent's arm across his centerline, clearing a path to his throat.

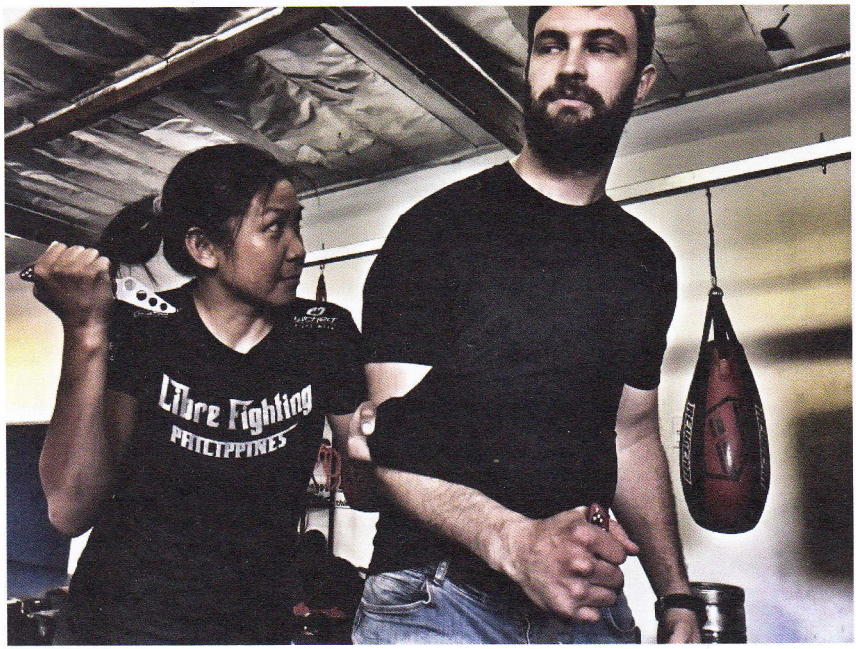
ELEMENT 5: Wall Work

A great deal of our knife training takes place against the wall or in close-quarters. It is important that the student begins to see walls and barriers not as obstacles, but as tools to be utilized. They add to the skilled practitioner's ability to control the opponent, as they can be used to trap them or to limit their movement and striking options.

In training against the wall, the student experiences two very important dynamics. In pinning an opponent against the wall, they experience complete (if momentary) control of their opponent. They learn to crave this level of control. They also learn how to inflict as much damage as possible, as quickly as possible, when they achieve this control. Conversely, when dummying for another student, they experience the helplessness of being trapped. In this sense, the predator/prey dynamic is played out repeatedly. Subconsciously, the student learns the importance of controlling the opponent in close quarters, utilizing their surroundings, as well as the importance of not

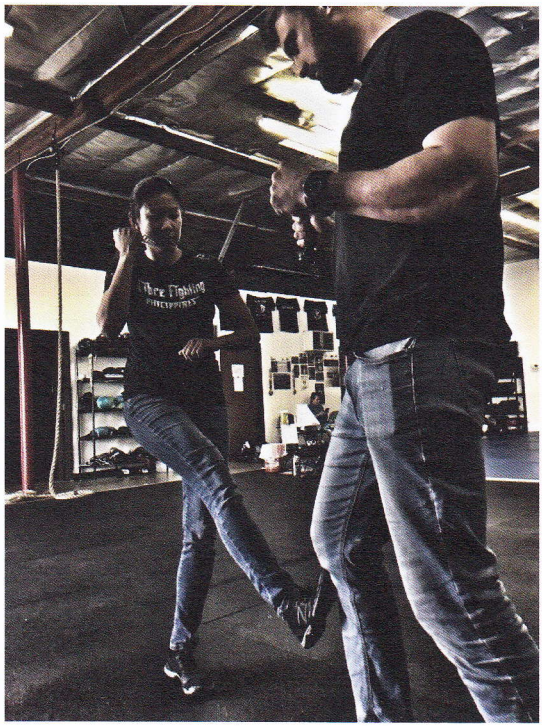
letting the opponent control them. They learn to think like a predator, and to reject any notion of playing the role of prey.

ELEMENT 6: Clothing Manipulation



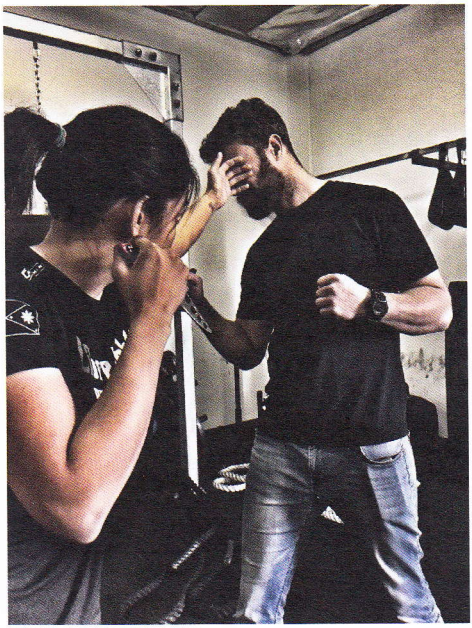
In Libre Fighting the opponent's clothing can be used to control, trap, blind, choke, or turn the opponent. Additionally, the practitioner trains to use their own clothing to conceal their knife, to obstruct the opponent's vision, and to conceal their attack.

ELEMENT 7: Base Disruptions



Low-line kicks to the shin, kneecap, thigh, and groin are used in conjunction with bladed attacks. Foot traps are also utilized to prevent an opponent from retreating, to hold them in a compromised position, and to facilitate ankle breaks.

ELEMENT 8: Off-Hand Strikes and Knife Passes



Aside from attacks to the opponent's eyes, the knife can have very unreliable stopping power. This being the case, slaps, hammer fists, eye flicks, head butts, and shoulder rams are used to create impact damage to the opponent and slow them down as they bleed out. These strikes can also be used to hide bladed attacks. It should be noted that in Libre the knife is sometimes passed to the left hand. Because of this, punches to the head are not utilized due to the risk of damaging the hand.

There are three basic schools of thought when it comes to passing the knife from one hand to the other.

First School of Thought: NEVER pass the knife.

This is the philosophy that most traditional knife combatives schools adhere to. Moving the knife from one hand to the other is simply too risky in a life and death altercation and to do so is foolish as it could easily be dropped. This school of thought holds that under duress, with fine motor skills diminished from an adrenaline dump, moving the knife from one hand to the other will never be worth the risk incurred in doing so.

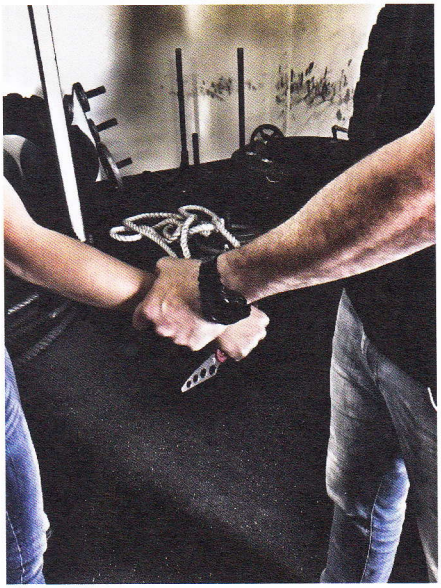
The Second School of Thought: Knife passing should be at the heart of one's skills.

This is the most unorthodox approach. Those who adhere to this approach believe that passing the knife from one hand to the other creates confusion in the opponent and hides the attack. Their approach dictates that with much practice the risk of dropping the blade can be minimized.

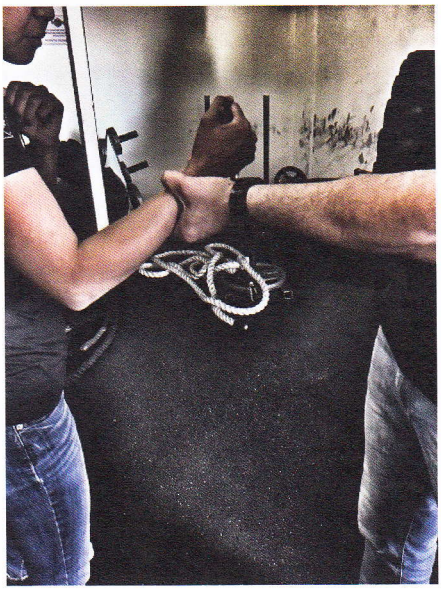
The Third School of Thought: Pass the knife only when the situation dictates it.

This is the approach Libre Fighting takes. In Libre Fighting the knife is generally only moved from one hand to the other when an opponent has restrained the knife hand and the practitioner is unable to break free, or circumstances dictate that simply breaking free would leave them in a compromised tactical position.

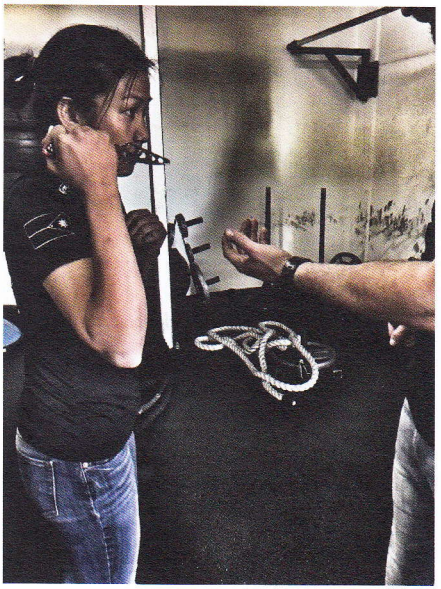
Against a Single-Hand Grab



The opponent latches on to the practitioner's weapon hand with an overhand grab.

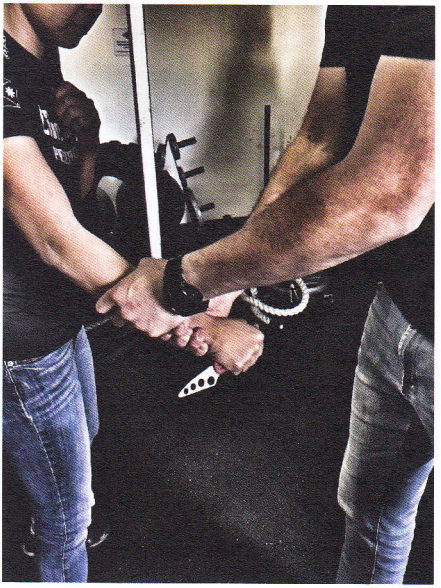


Rather than passing the knife, the practitioner twists her arm, leveraging it against the opponent's thumb.

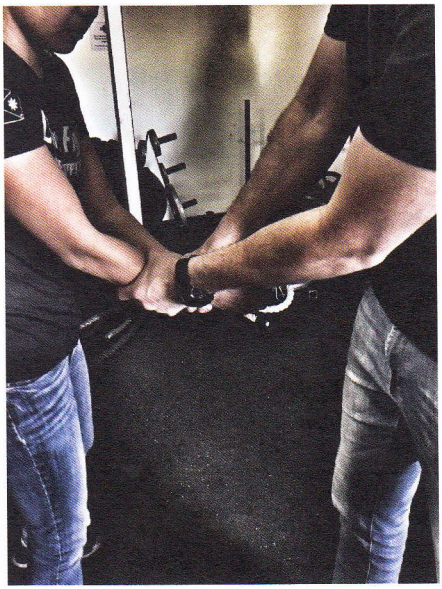


Contending with only the opponent's thumb, she is able to break free of his grip.

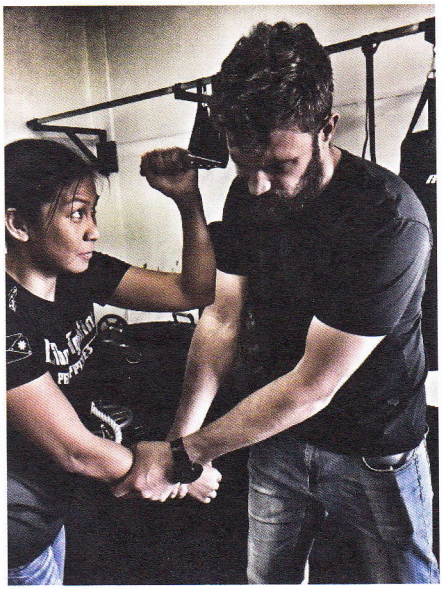
Against a Two-Hand Grab



The opponent latches on to the practitioner's arm with both hands.



Knowing she cannot overpower the opponent's grip, she passes the knife to her free hand, using his own arms to block his line-of-sight so that he does not see the pass happen.

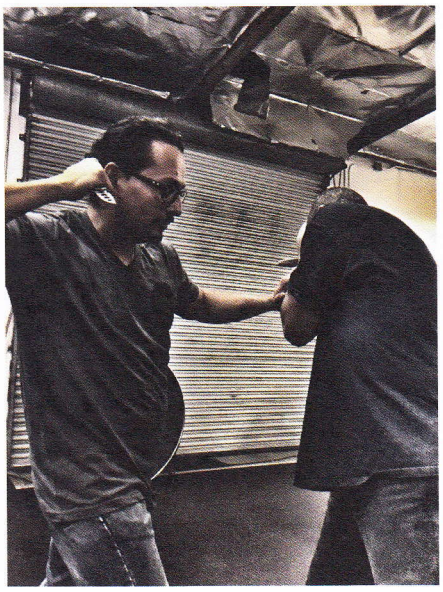


With the knife discretely passed to her left hand, she stabs the opponent in the eye while he still holds on to her right arm.

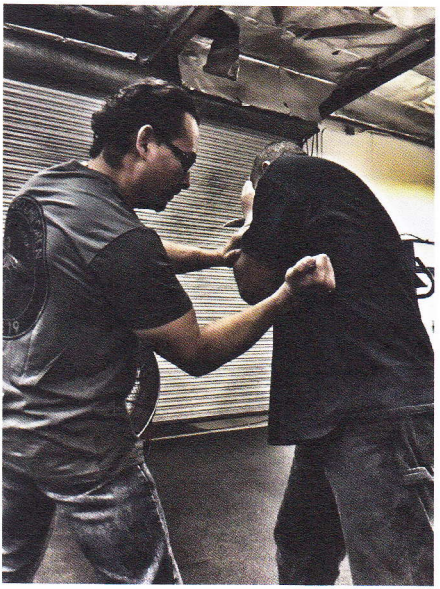
SAMPLE TECHNIQUES

SEQUENCE 1 (1 – 2 – 3 – 2)

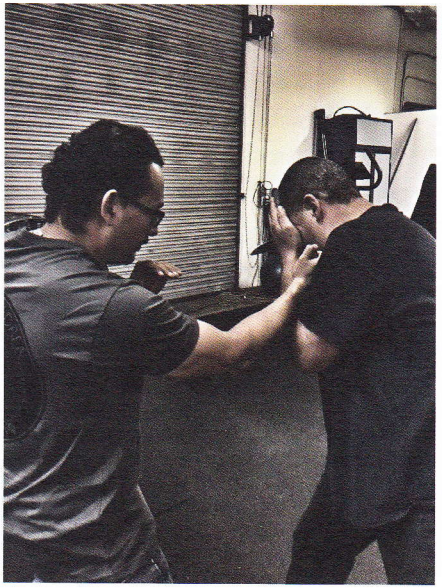
An **Eye Spike** (#1 element) is delivered to the opponent's left eye.



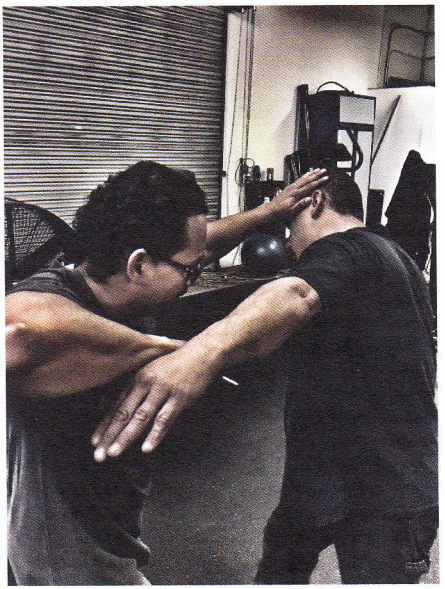
As the opponent reacts to the damaged eye, his arm is checked to hold it in place and impede any counter. The practitioner then moves to the opponent's blinded side to press the attack. This is known as **"Blind Siding".**



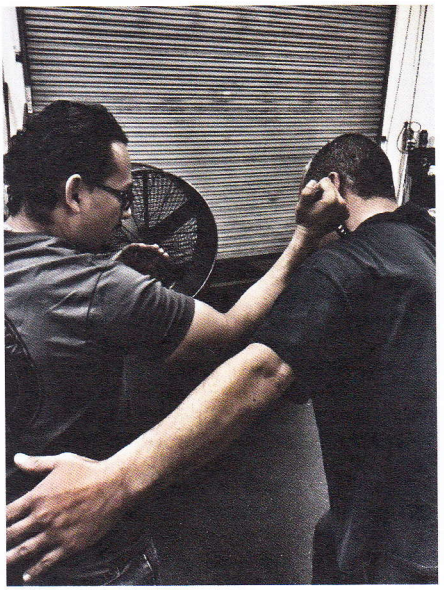
A **Left Lung Puncture** (#2 Element) is delivered to the opponent's left side.



Using the inside edge of the knife, the practitioner hooks in behind the opponent's left arm to execute a **Pendulum** (#3 element).

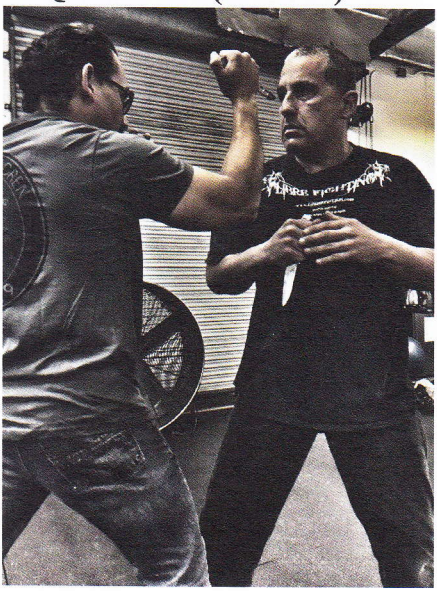


The practitioner pulls the opponent's arm away from his face, filleting it in the process. Simultaneously, he pushes the opponent's head towards his right shoulder to hold his weapon at bay and expose the left carotid artery.

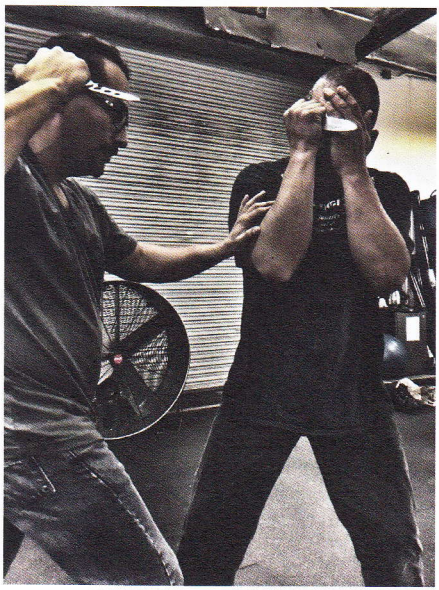


The practitioner **stabs the opponent's left carotid artery** (#2 element).

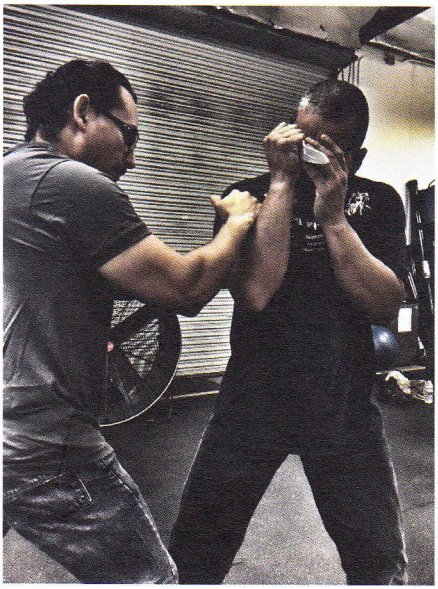
SEQUENCE 2 (1 – 3 – 2)



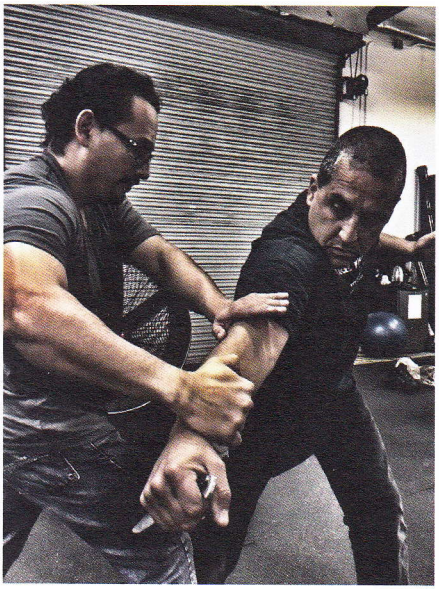
An **Eye Spike** (#1 element) is delivered to the opponent's right eye.



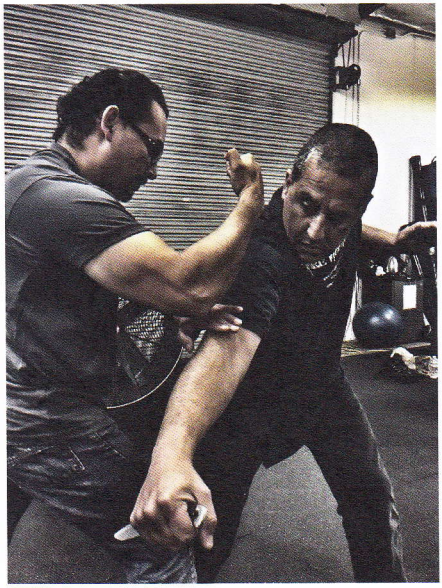
As the opponent reacts to the damaged eye, his arm is checked to hold it in place and impede any counter. The practitioner prepares to **"Blind Side"** to the opponent's right.



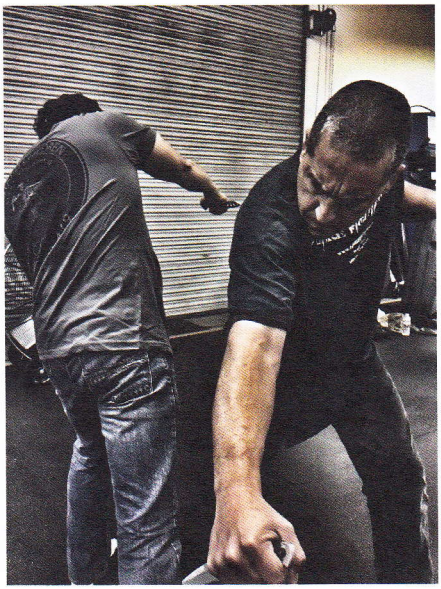
Using the inside edge of the knife, the practitioner hooks in behind the opponent's right arm to execute a **Pendulum** (#3 element).



The practitioner pulls the opponent's arm away from his face, **filleting it** in the process.
Simultaneously, he pushes the opponent's arm away to hold his weapon at bay and expose the subclavian artery.

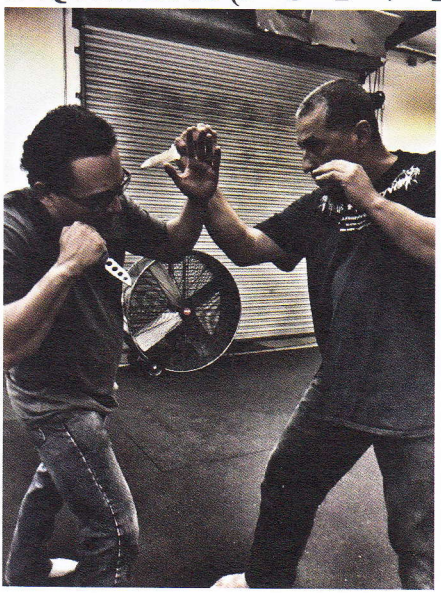


The practitioner **stabs the opponent's subclavian artery** (#2 element).



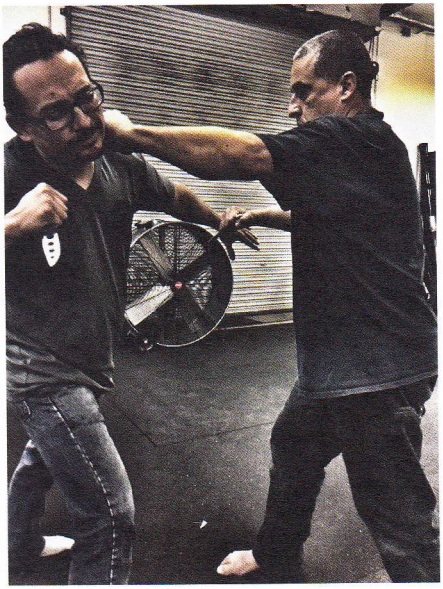
The practitioner steps past the opponent **ripping** the knife free in the process.

SEQUENCE #3 (3 – 8 – 2 – 7 – 2)

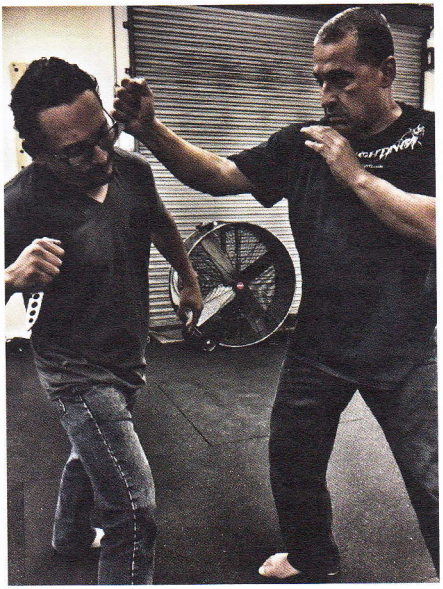


The practitioner attempts a stab to the opponent's throat but is blocked.

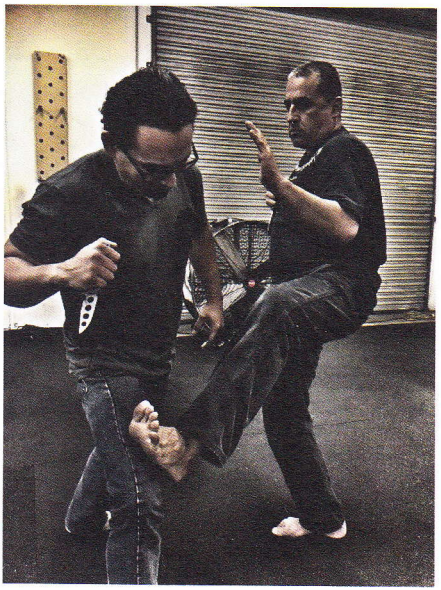
The practitioner uses a **Pendulum** (#3 element) to scoop the opponent's arm out of the way, **filleting** his arm as he does so, and chambering his left.



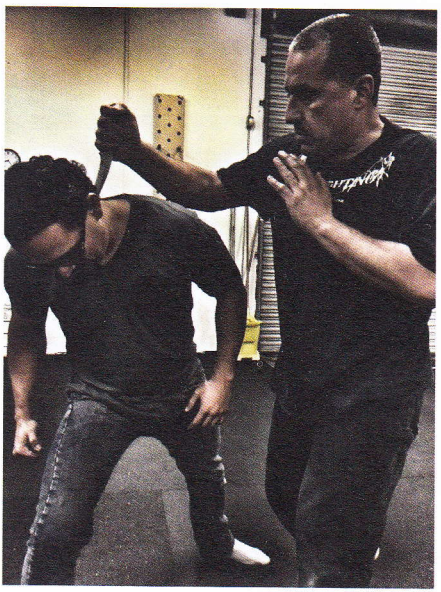
The practitioner delivers a **hammer fist** (#8 element) to the left side of the opponent's jaw.



The practitioner delivers a **stab to the left side of the opponent's neck** (#2 element).

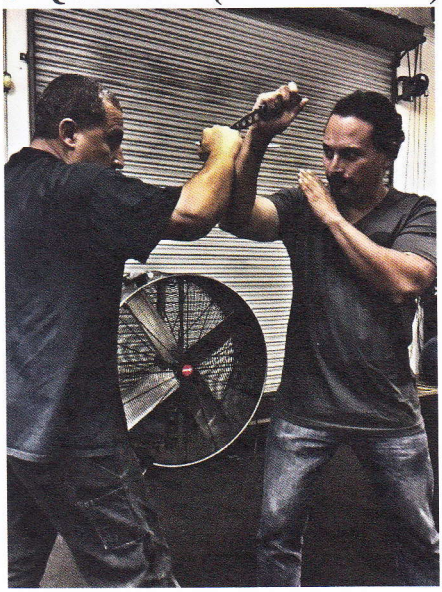


The practitioner delivers a **Stomp Kick** (#7 element) to the inside of the opponent's right thigh to turn him away and expose his back.

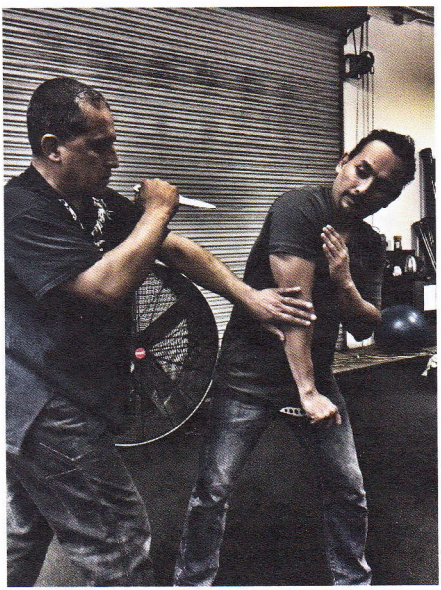


The practitioner delivers a **stab to the base of the opponent's skull** (#2 element).

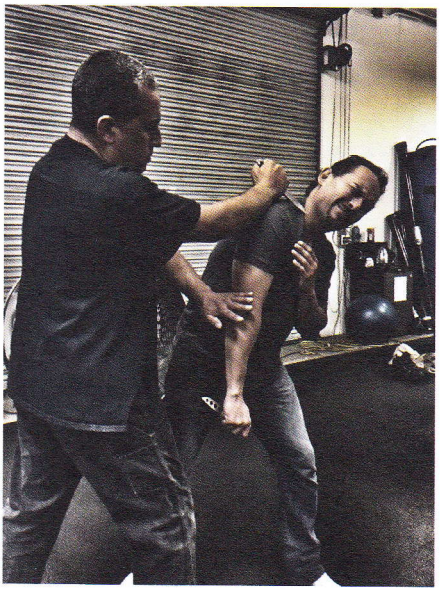
SEQUENCE 4 (4 – 2 – 2 – 2 – 2)



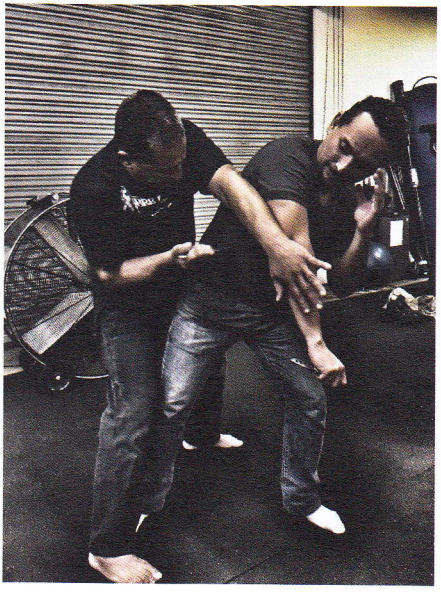
The practitioner attempts a stab to the eye but it is intercepted by the opponent's right arm.



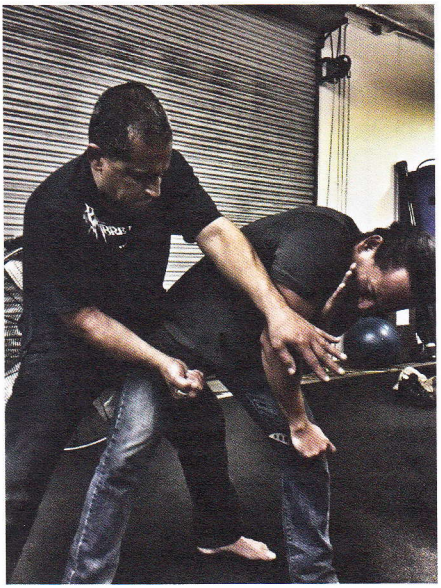
The practitioner **checks the opponent's block down** (#4 element) to clear a path to the opponent's throat.



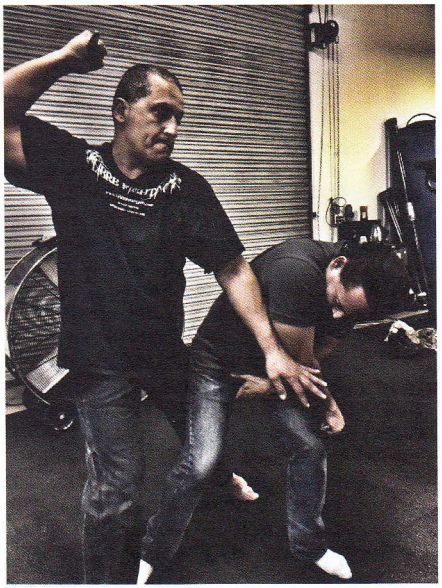
Keeping the arm checked, the practitioner stabs through the side of the opponent's neck, severing both carotid arteries and the windpipe all in one motion. This is known as a **Trinity Stab** (#2 element).



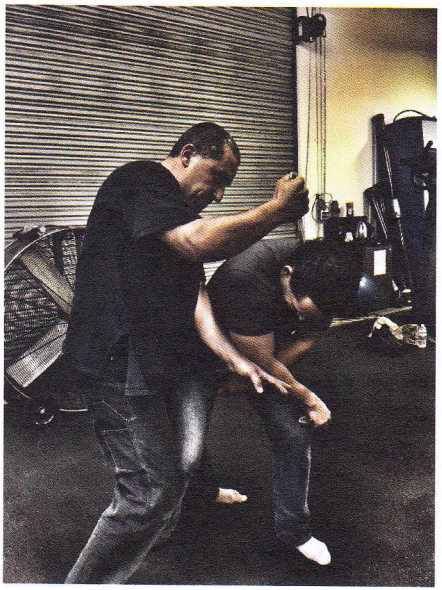
The practitioner flanks to the opponent's right, stepping in and driving a **stab into the opponent's liver** (#2 element).



A **stab to the groin** (#2 element) is then delivered to double the opponent over.

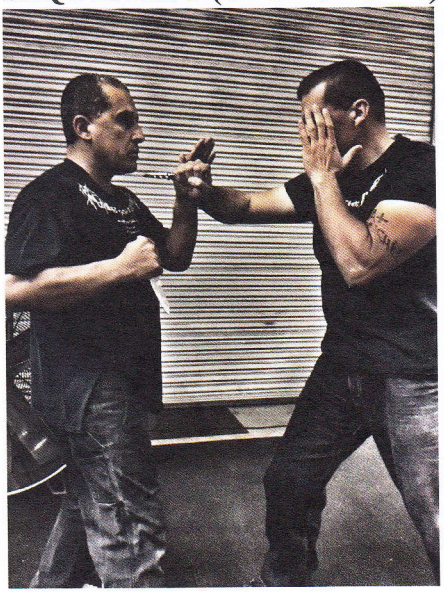


The practitioner then raises up to deliver a final blow.

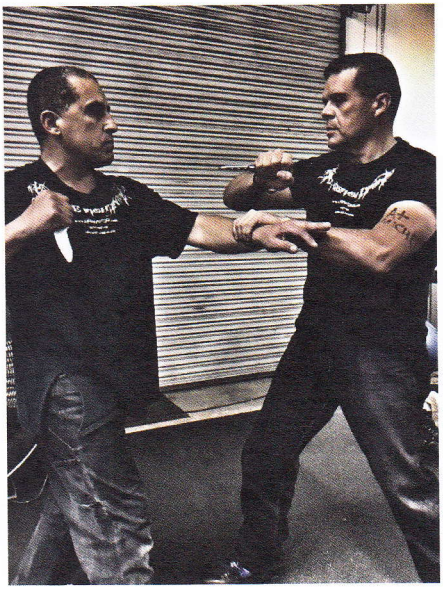


A powerful **Percussio Stab** (#2 element) is delivered to the base of the opponent's skull.

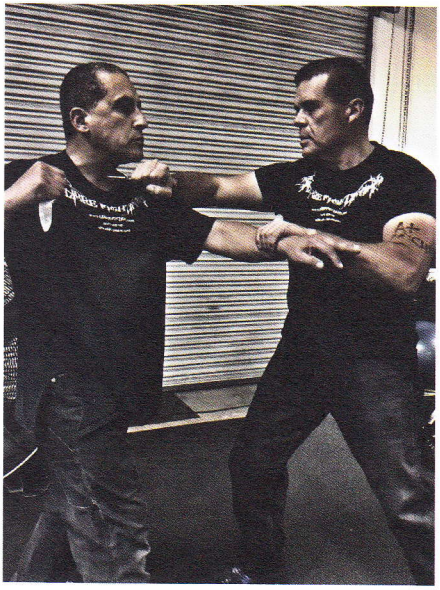
SEQUENCE 5 (4 – 2 – 8 – 2 – 8)



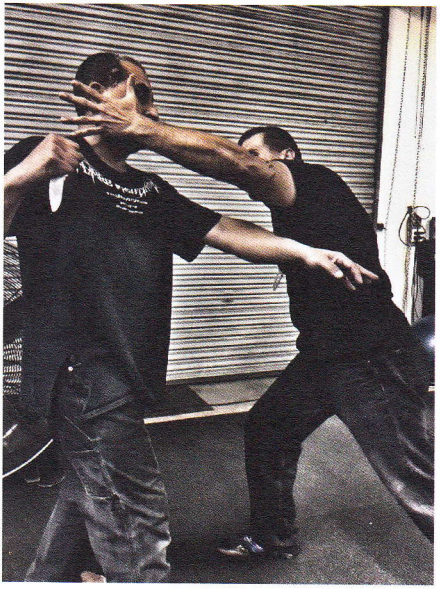
The practitioner attempts and stab to the throat, but his attack is intercepted.



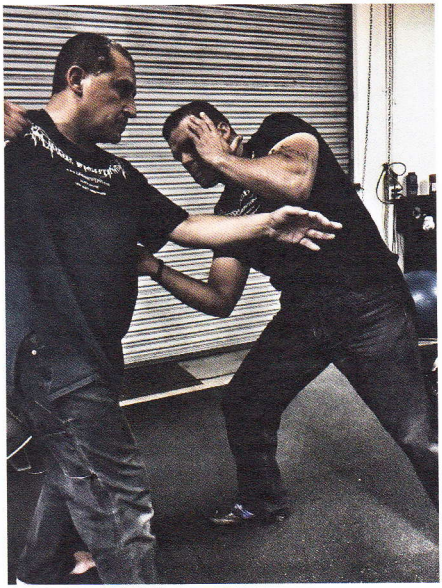
The block is cleared out of the way (#4 element), exposing the opponent's throat.



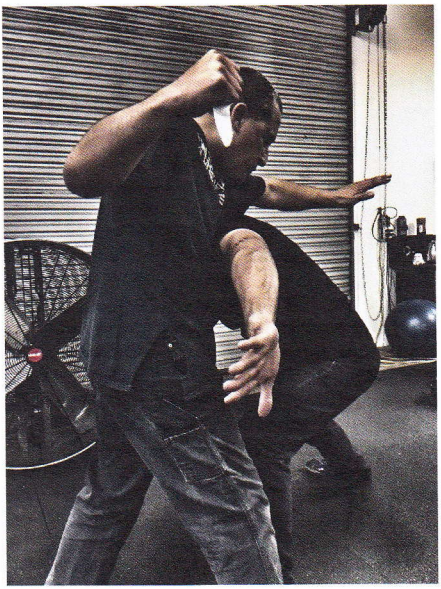
The opponent's arm is pulled to help shield the practitioner from his knife. **A stab to the opponent's throat is delivered** (#2 element).



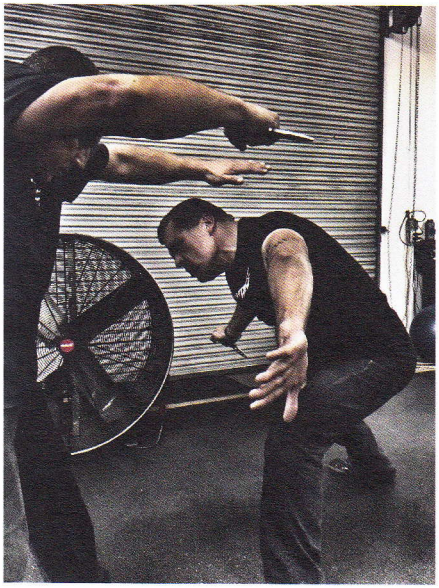
A **left-hand slap** (#8 element) is delivered to the opponent's face.



While the opponent is disoriented a **left lung puncture** (#3 element) is delivered.

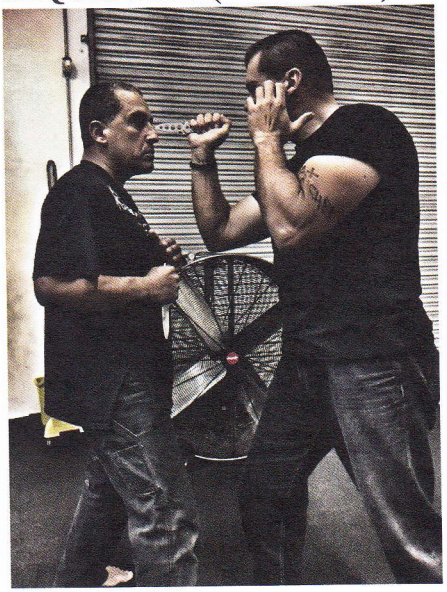


The practitioner steps in, connecting with a shoulder blast to the opponent's ribs, this is known as **Bull Rushing** (#8 element).

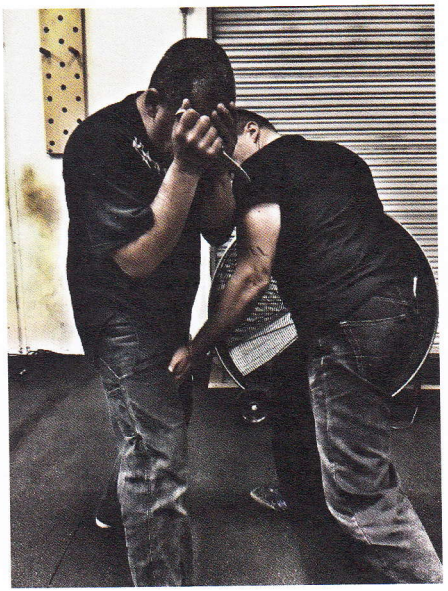


The impact knocks the opponent back.

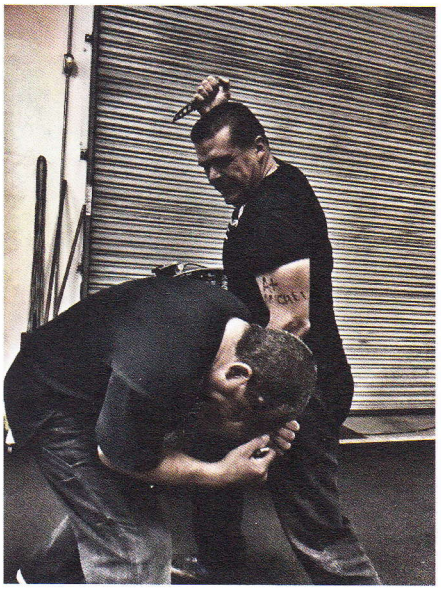
SEQUENCE 6 (1 – 8 – 2 – 2)



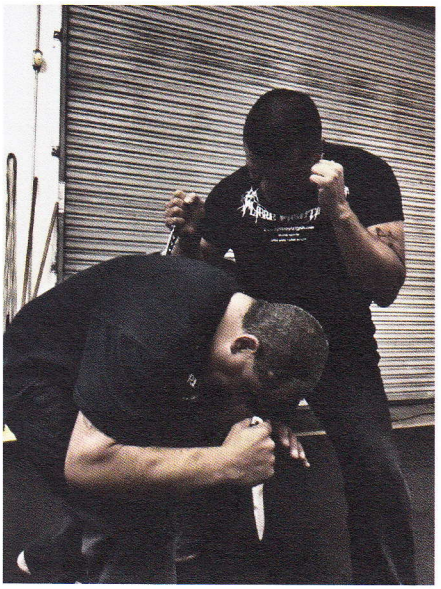
At close range, an **Eye Spike** (#1 element) is delivered to the opponent's left eye.



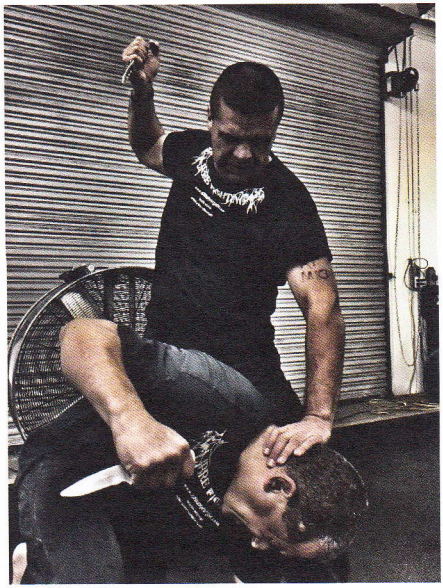
The practitioner **"blind sides"** and flanks to the opponent's left, **slapping the opponent's groin** (#8 element).



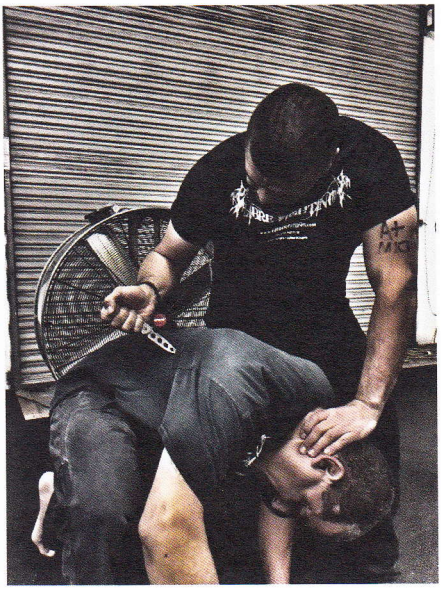
As the opponent doubles over the practitioner raises up, preparing to execute a powerful downward stab.



A **Percussio Stab** (#2 element) sinks into the opponent's back, driving him down.

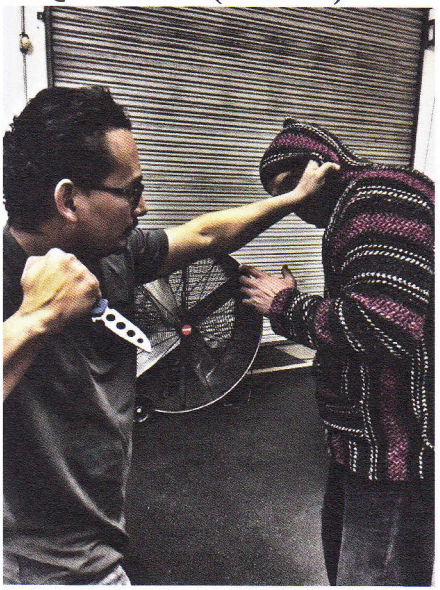


The practitioner puts pressure on the back of the opponent's head, holding him down in a vulnerable position.

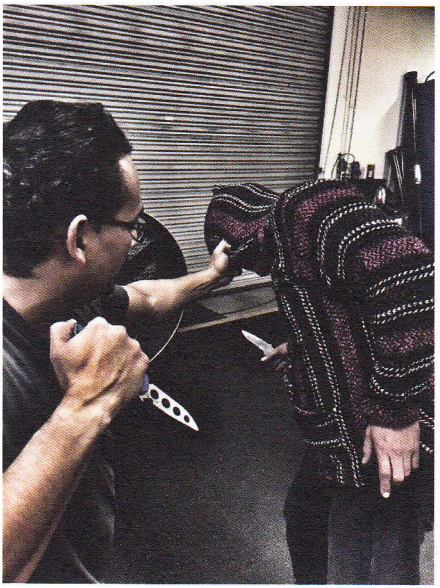


A **Right Lung Puncture** (#2 element) is delivered.

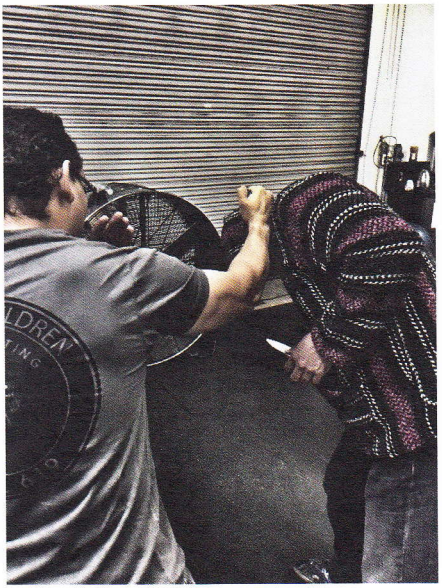
SEQUENCE 7 (6 – 2 – 2)



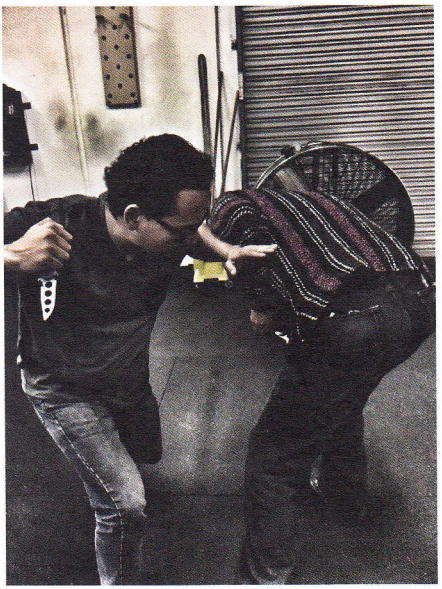
The practitioner grabs hold of the opponent's hood.



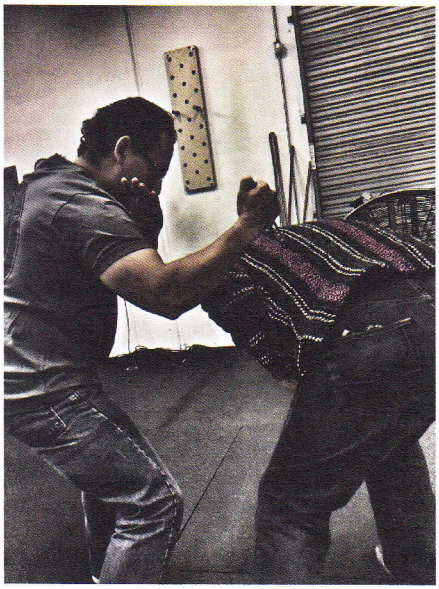
He then **pulls the hood across the opponent's face** (#6 element) to turn the opponent and obstruct his vision.



The practitioner then **stabs through the hood** (#2 element) and into the opponent's neck.

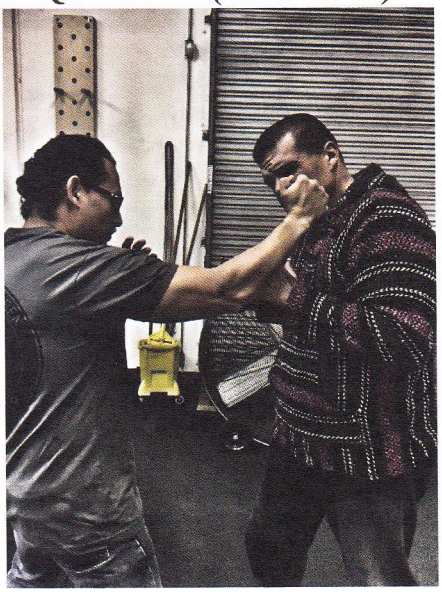


He then flanks away from the opponent's weapon, moving to the opponent's left.

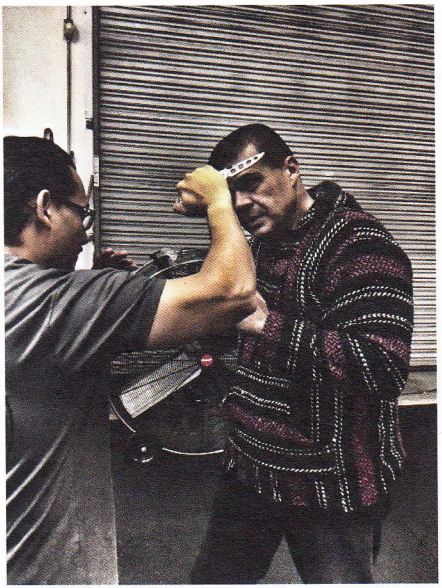


Angled safely away from the opponent's weapon, he delivers a **stab into the opponent's left lung** (#2 element).

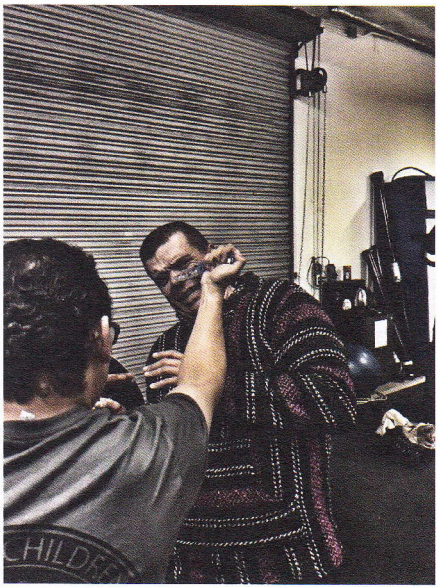
SEQUENCE 8 (2 – 1 – 6 – 2)



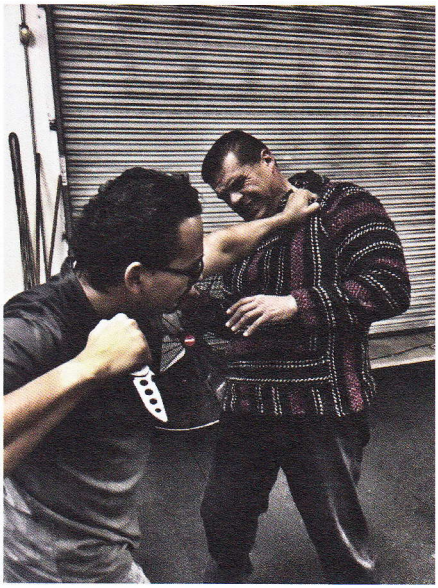
The practitioner opens with **a stab to the opponent's left brachial artery** (#2 element).



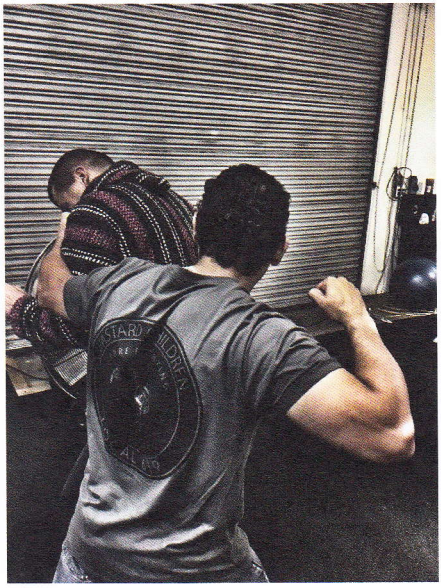
He then withdraws the blade and prepares to flick the opponent's left eye.



Using the tip of the blade, the practitioner delivers a **Horizontal Flick** (#1 element) across the opponent's eye.



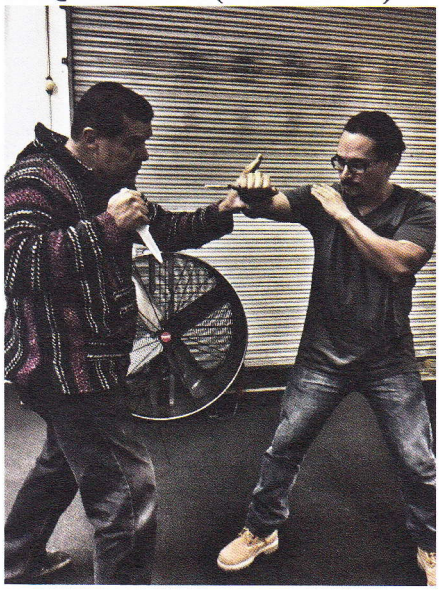
As the opponent reacts to the eye flick, the practitioner latches onto the upper left side of the opponent's clothing.



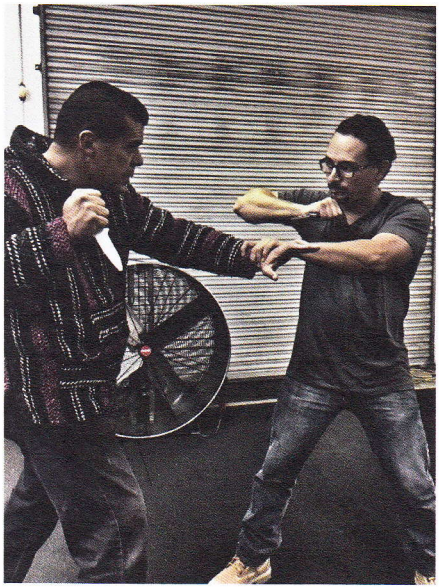
The practitioner **yanks the opponent to the side** (#6 element) and steps to his back, shielding himself from the opponent's weapon.

The practitioner finishes with a **stab** (#2 element) to the opponent's left kidney.

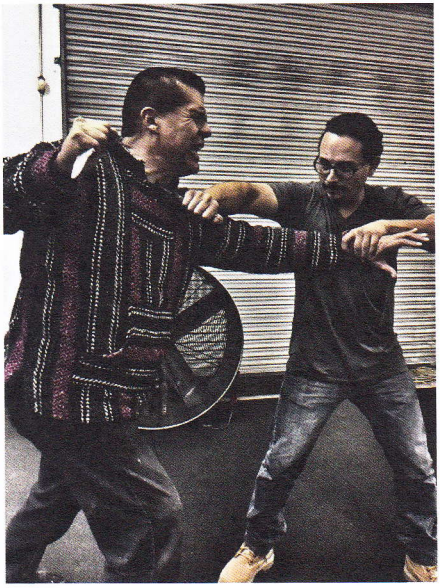
SEQUENCE 9 (4 – 1 – 7 – 2)



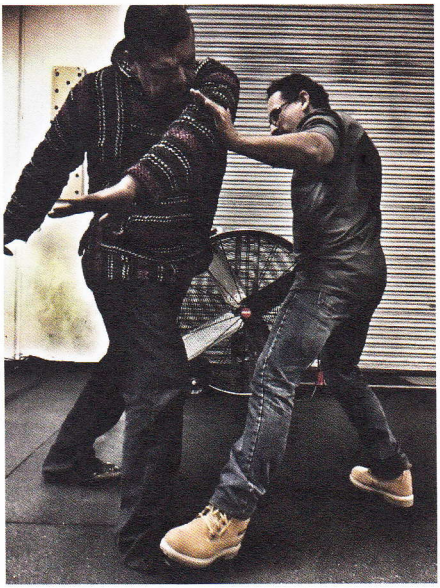
The practitioner attempts to stab the opponent's throat, but his attack is blocked.



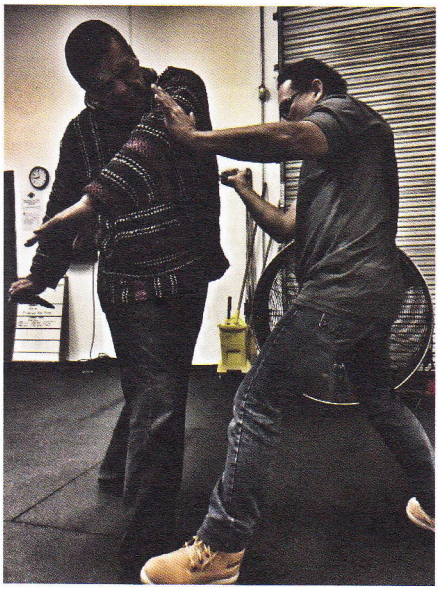
He then **clears the opponent's block** (#4 element), exposing the opponent's throat.



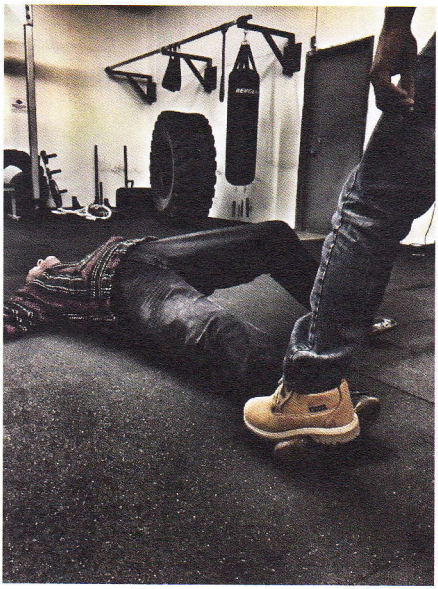
Pulling on the opponent's left arm to shield himself from the opponent's weapon, he **stabs the opponent in his throat** (#2 element).



The practitioner moves in, pushing the opponent's arm across his body and **stepping on the opponent's right foot** (#7 element) with his left foot.



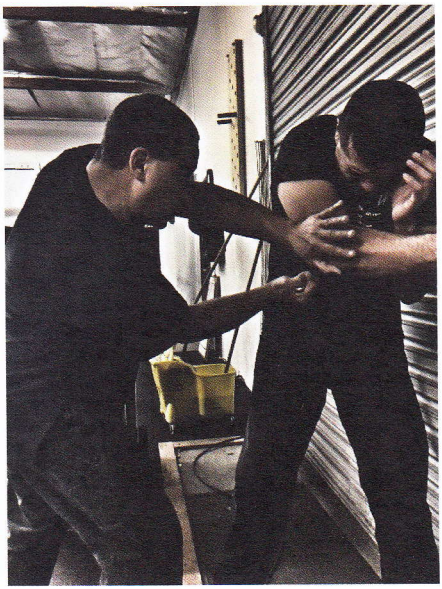
With the opponent's foot trapped and his balance compromised, the practitioner delivers a hard **Left Lung Puncture** (#2 Element).



Keeping his weight on the opponent's foot, he allows the impact from the lung puncture to further disrupt the opponent's balance, knocking him over and **snapping his ankle** in the process. The opponent lands with his blade out of reach of the practitioner.

SEQUENCE 10 (4 – 2 – 5 – 8 – 2 – 2)

The practitioner **checks the opponent's weapon arm across his body** (#4 element), momentarily taking it out of play.

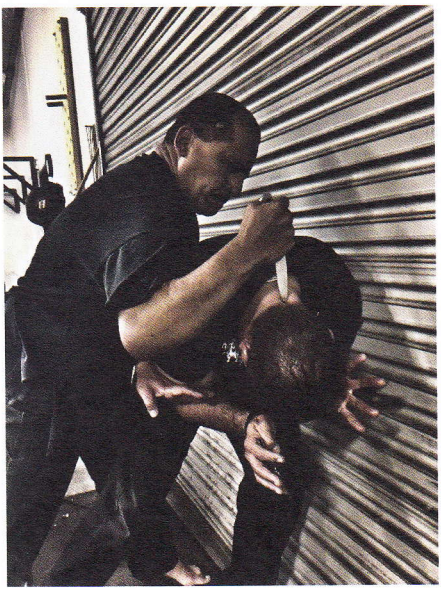


He then follows up with a **stab** (#2 element) to the opponent's liver.

The practitioner then drives in, **slamming the opponent into the wall** (#5 element) while simultaneously **delivering a head butt** (#8 element).

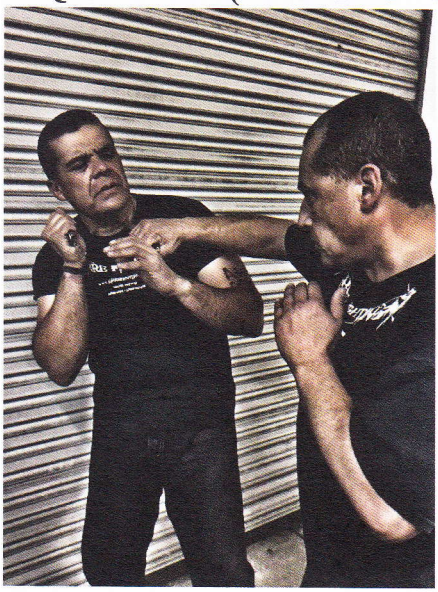
Keeping the opponent pinned against the wall, he follows up with a **stab** to the opponent's right brachial artery (#2 element).

As the opponent attempts to cover up, the practitioner raises up for a powerful downward stab.

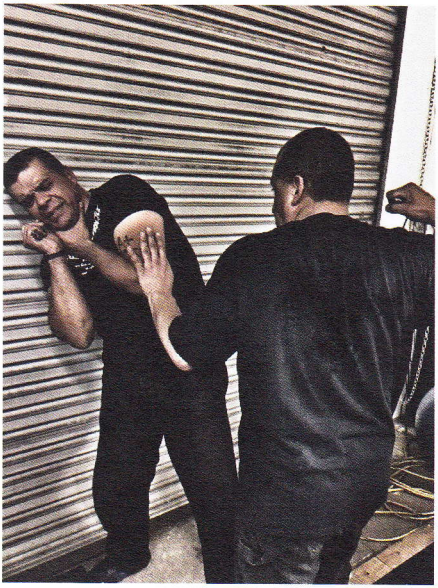


He finishes with a **Percussio Stab** (#2 element) to the base of the opponent's skull.

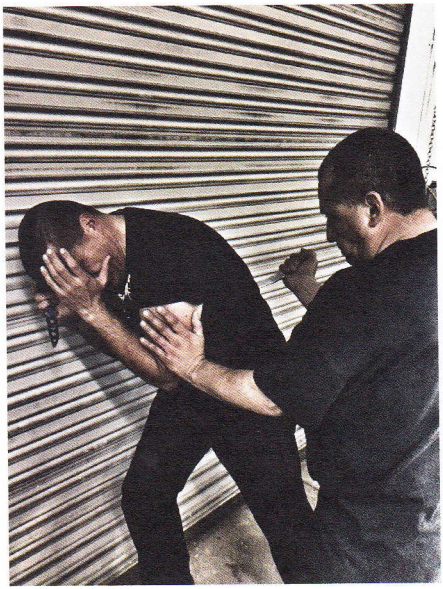
SEQUENCE 11 (2 – 5 – 2 – 7 – 2)



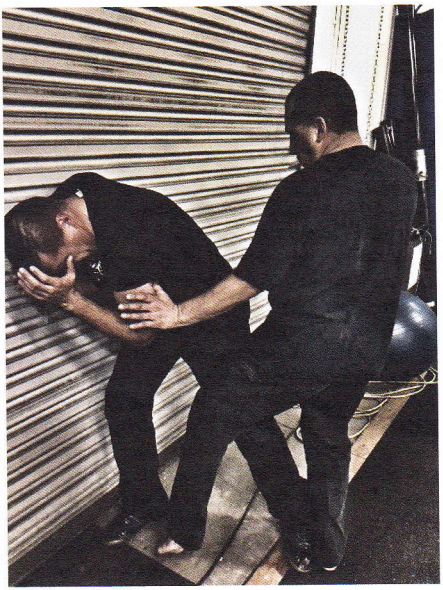
The practitioner opens with a **stab** (#2 element) to the opponent's throat.



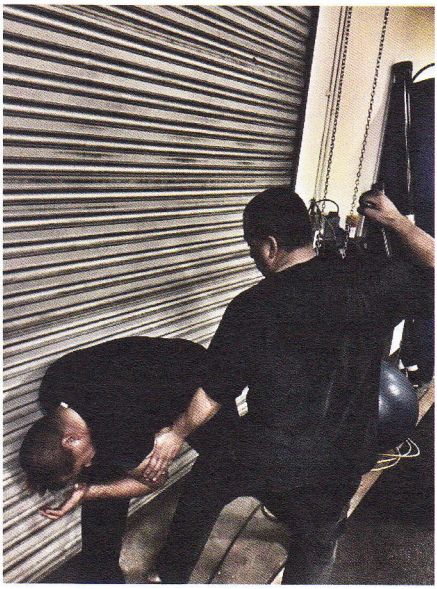
As the opponent reacts, he uses that moment to push the opponent into the wall.



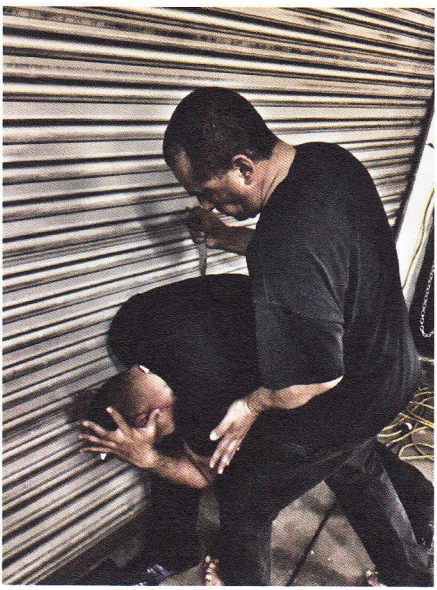
Pinning the opponent against the wall (#5 element), he delivers a **stab to the opponent's left kidney** (#2 element).



He then **knees the opponent's thigh** (#7 element).



The impact from the knee strike knocks the opponent's left leg out from underneath him, doubling him over.



The practitioner then finishes with a **downward stab to the opponent's right kidney** (#2 element).

DEFENSE TACTICS

The Libre Fighting approach dictates that if someone is menacing you with a weapon, and is close enough to cut or stab you, then you should already be attacking. The Libre Fighting practitioner always seeks to control the engagement, not react to it. Generally speaking, employing defensive countermeasures and reactions means there was a failure on the practitioner's part. However, should such a failure occur, the practitioner should be adept at countering an opponent's attack.

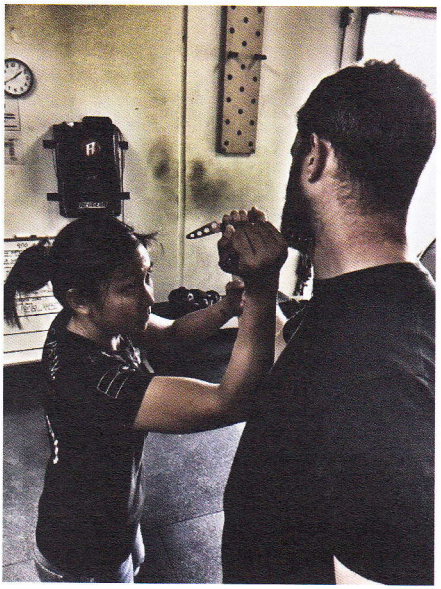
THE HORIZON

Controlling distance is the first line of defense in the practitioner's arsenal. "The Horizon" is the range just outside the opponent's maximum reach. The phrase "playing the horizon" refers to maintaining a distance of six to twelve inches outside of the opponent's range, until an opening presents itself for the practitioner to move in with an assault to take control of the situation.

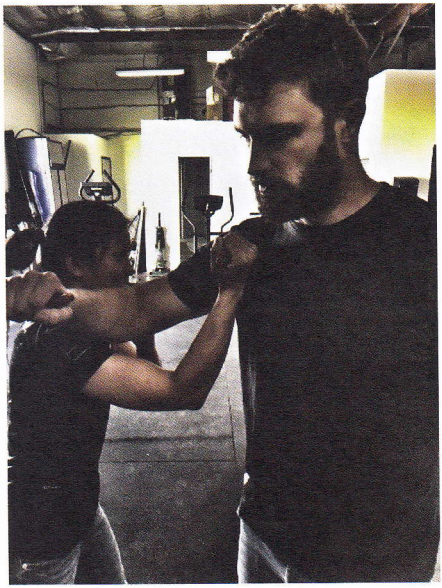
BLOCKING AND CHANGING LEVELS

Should a practitioner have to block an attack they should attempt to meet the opponent's forearm with the edge of their own if possible, or otherwise with the palm of their hand. Simultaneously, the practitioner should execute a counter, in order to stifle the opponent's assault and take control of the exchange.

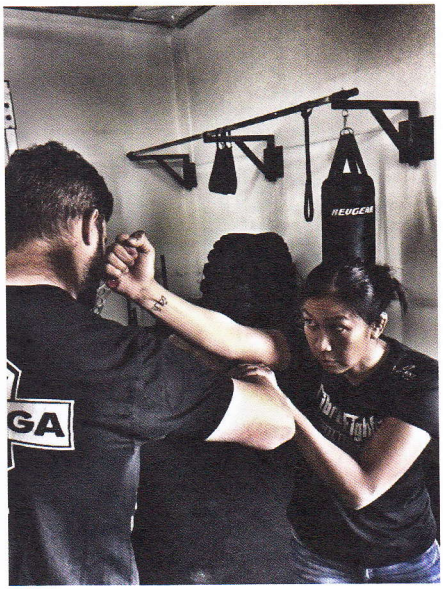
BLOCKING EXAMPLES



The practitioner blocks the opponent's forehand attack with her left arm while simultaneously countering to his neck.

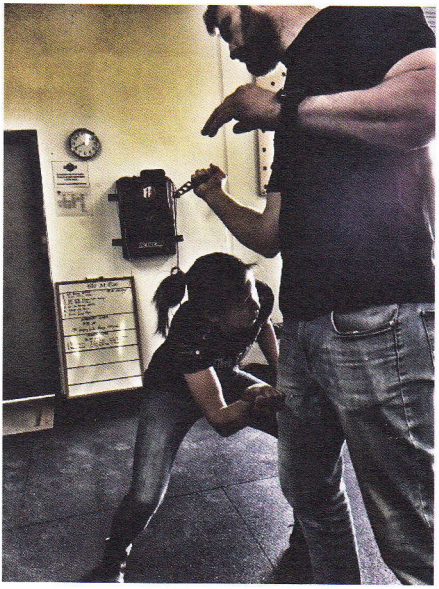


The practitioner steps inside the range of the opponent's backhand strike and checks it with her left hand, while countering under the opponent's arm to his right brachial artery.



The practitioner intercepts the opponent's backhand strike with her left hand, while simultaneously countering over the opponent's arm to his right subclavian artery.

DUCKING EXAMPLE



Against a much taller opponent, the practitioner ducks under his forehand strike while stabbing to his femoral artery.

THE BLENDER – BAPTISM BY FIRE

Once the student has learned all of the basics the blender work is introduced.

The Blender is knife sparring in a decent sized storage closet or similar confined space. This is the student's indoctrination into knife sparring. It is incredibly fast and incredibly chaotic. The blender forces the student to take on an assertive role, because if they aren't bringing the fight to their opponent, they are going to quickly be overwhelmed, as giving ground is not an option. The furthest you can get from an opponent is just outside of their striking range. A half-step forward by either fighter brings them both right back into the danger zone. The walls must be utilized. If you aren't making the walls work for you, they are working against you.

The attack must be constantly varied to create openings, and the defense must be ever-present. Skirmishes last only ten to twenty seconds, as the body and mind both take a bit of a pounding in the constant chaos.

Many people wonder why Libre Fighting starts students sparring in the blender, as opposed to on the open floor. There are two reasons.

- It takes them out of a "dueling" mindset right away, and forces them to acknowledge they are in a fight.
- After sparring in the blender, sparring on the open floor feels like it is happening in slow motion.

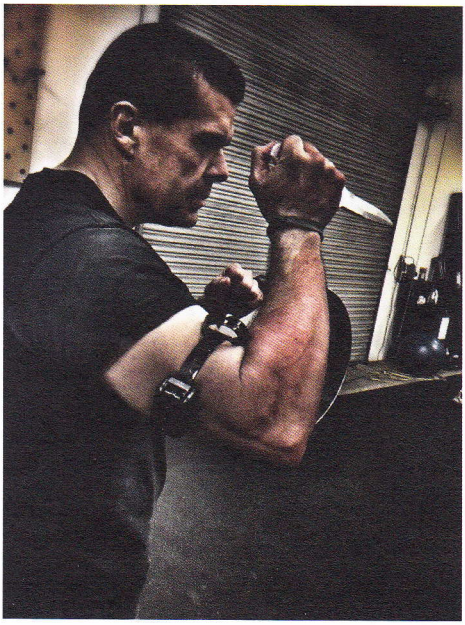
In Filipino martial arts training is often done with heavy pipes in place of sticks. The practitioner's mind and muscles became so accustomed to the weight of the pipes that when they put them down and pick up rattan sticks they feel almost weightless in their hands. The blender is exactly the opposite. It is a seemingly uncontrollable storm, yet with experience, one learns to manipulate and shape the chaos to their advantage. When they step out onto the open floor, they feel like they are sparring in slow motion. They see the attacks coming from a mile away, their feints and footwork create larger openings, their evasions happen with ease.

The blender is essential in developing the Libre Mind. It teaches the student how to use their aggression and predatory instincts to create holes in the opponent's defense. It forces them to use tactics instinctively, because it moves far too fast to plan ahead. The Blender takes Libre Fighting from being a club and molds it into a rapier.

TRAINING MODIFIERS

Once a student has mastered the mechanics, the next step is to introduce training modifiers to ensure they can stay composed under pressure. Working in a familiar, well lit, compliant environment is beneficial in the early stages of training. It is important to realize, however, that one will not be complete as a fighter until they are capable of applying their skills in the midst of chaos. Violence is messy and unpredictable, this is especially true when it comes to knives. Bladed combat is nasty and visceral. It is an environment of gaping wounds, arterial spray, spilled intestines, and mangled flesh. It is nothing short of horrific, and nothing anyone should ever want to experience firsthand. Because of this, a practitioner must train themselves to stay focused on their work as much as possible. This is where training modifiers come into play.

SHOCK COLLARS



These are used to train canines by delivering an electrical current at the push of a button. These collars can be attached to a student's arm or leg and randomly activated during training and sparring, invoking a sharp jolt that the student must ignore.

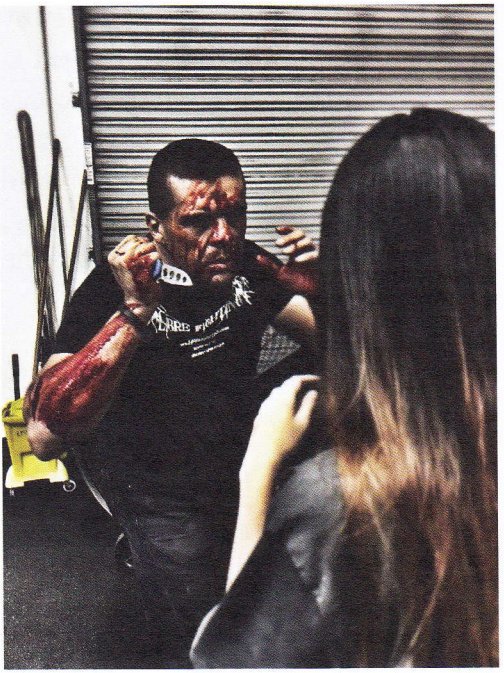
A few safety notes:

The electrical current can cause minor burns to the skin. Any wounds should be treated at the completion of the training session.

People have wildly different pain tolerances when it comes to electricity. Shock collars can be set to various intensity levels, and it is important to find a point that is within the student's limits. Some people will be at capacity at as little as 10-15% power. Others may only have a moderate reaction at 100%. Work within the student's personal limits.

Shock collars should only be used by people in good health, with no medical or mental conditions that could react adversely to this training.

BLOOD SIMULATORS



Stage blood can be smeared on the students face to impede vision, and on the arms to create a slippery surface to deal with. Additionally, it can be inserted into large syringes and shot across students faces to simulate arterial spray. This also creates a visual desensitization, getting students used to seeing blood on their opponents so that they will not be shocked by the sight of large amounts of blood if ever called upon to fight for their lives.

A few safety notes:

One should be careful working with people who suffer from PTSD when doing this type of training.

Stage blood can be very slippery, use caution and only work on a ground surface that is safe.

Stage blood is very messy and can destroy clothing and wreck any room it is used in. This is best used outside and away from prying eyes that may mistake what is happening for actual violence.

LOW LIGHT TRAINING

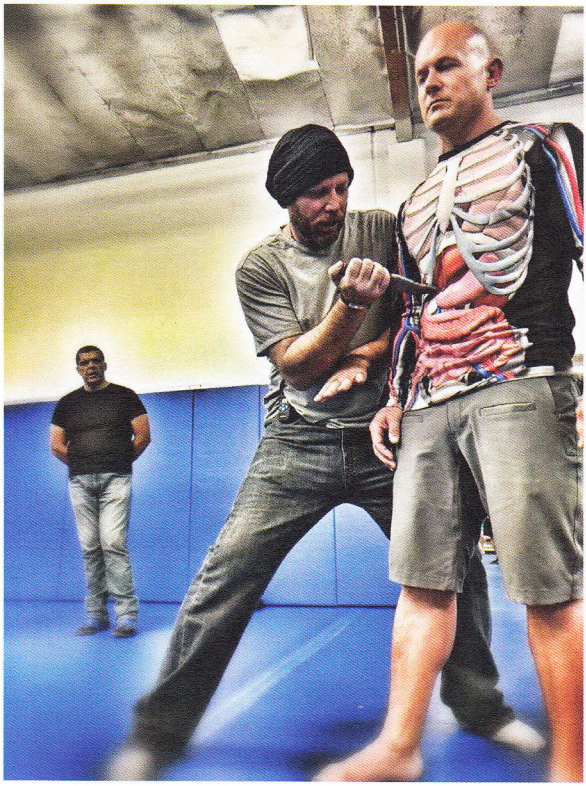
The majority of knife attacks happen after dark. This being the case, it is important to be comfortable working in low light conditions. Lighting can range from moderately dark, to near pitch black. Working in low light conditions allows the student to develop tactile sensitivity and other skills used to determine the opponent's position and strike vital targets. Foot traps and clothing manipulations take on added importance in this training, as they keep the student connected to their opponent.

A few safety considerations: eye protection and soft training knives made from foam tubing or foam matting should only be used. Control must be exercised at all times. Students should be introduced to this training very slowly, and intensity should only be added incrementally, no faster than the student can safely handle.

CONFINED SPACE TRAINING

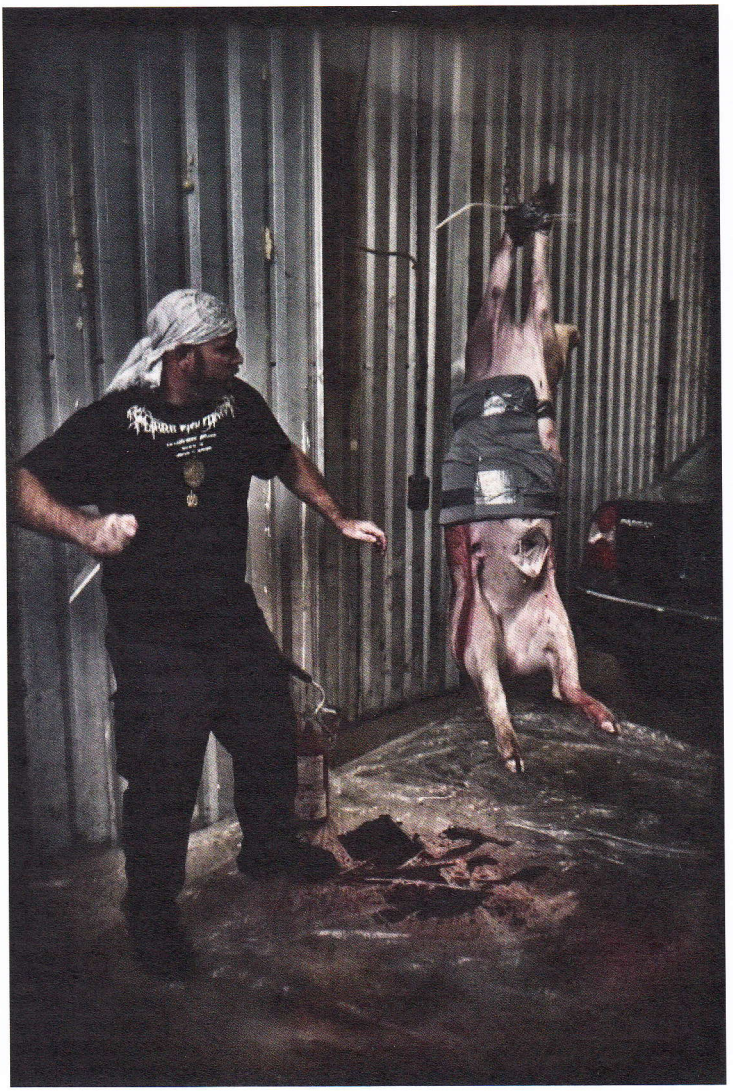
Working exclusively in a level, open training space creates poor situational awareness and unrealistic expectations. A real bladed altercation may occur in a home, crowd, bar, alley, parking lot, doorway, elevator, or any number of places where movement may be severely limited. A Libre Fighting practitioner should not only be comfortable working in confined spaces, they should excel in this environment and be adept at using walls and obstacles to control, pin, trip, or trap the opponent.

ANATOMY SHIRT



Anatomy shirts (or rash guards) are available from various companies and are an invaluable resource for illustrating targeting to new students. In drilling, these shirts aid in developing proper mechanics and refining accuracy. Additionally, these shirts can be worn during filmed sparring sessions and the footage reviewed later to see exactly how accurate the fighter's strikes were.

ORGANIC MEDIUMS



It is hard to truly respect the damage a blade can do, or the ease with which that damage can be inflicted, without putting it into flesh. Pigs have long been used in medical research because they share a number of anatomical and physiological similarities with humans. For our purposes, pig carcasses are also preferred because they can be relatively

easy to procure through butcher shops. It should be noted that knife failure or improper grip can cause a student to do great bodily harm to themselves, so this training should only be done under the supervision of a qualified instructor.

PUPPET MASTERING

Puppet Mastering is a skill that takes years to develop and represents the highest level of Libre Fighting. It is the psychological and physical manipulation of your opponent through aggression, feints, evasion, bravado and tactics.

Boxing fans have no doubt heard commentators use phrases like "he's laying traps for his opponent", "he seems to have his opponent figured out", and "his opponent is afraid to let his hands go." This is the essence of Puppet Mastering.

A skilled Libre practitioner gets inside his opponent's head and makes them move where they want them to move, strike when they want them to strike and react how they want them to react. This is done through the culmination of knife and footwork skills combined with the blender and extensive sparring experience. The blade is fast and aggressive, preventing the opponent from overwhelming the practitioner. Through body positioning, angling and baiting the opponent into striking when and where the practitioner wants them to, his own bladed attacks are hidden by obscuring the opponent's line-of-sight. Elusive footwork is used to offset and confuse the opponent and control the distancing and pace of the exchanges. Through experience the practitioner learns to read his opponent, to ascertain through body language if he is aggressive or a counter-striker, if he is skittish or composed under pressure, if he throws caution to the wind or is defensive-minded. Inexperienced

fighters can often almost be fully controlled by an experienced practitioner; while more experienced opponents may only be able to be controlled in momentary spurts at best.

Puppet Mastering becomes increasingly important as the gifts of youth begin to erode. As we age our muscles grow weaker, our reflexes dull, we lose our stamina, our bodies grow stiff, and we aren't the athletes we were in our youth. However, experience may have made our timing a bit sharper, and superior body mechanics learned through years of application may carry more impact. Of course, even these adjustments have their limitations. The real advantage of age and experience comes from getting into the opponent's head; sensing their movements, and making them move how we want them to move. The more seasoned fighter may not be able to take advantage of openings the way they used to, but they will create openings with ease. It is important to realize as we continue to age, our physical skills will slowly continue to diminish. As these skills fade, our shots will have to be more focused, more accurate. Our intent and willingness to engage will have to grow stronger. But most importantly, we must compensate by maximizing our ability to manipulate the opponent.

Puppet Mastering is the best tool at our disposal to fight our greatest enemy—age. It is also the highest level of the Libre Mind.

Two Closing Essays on the Subject of Training

Achieving Excellence

"I'll keep it short and sweet. Family, religion, friendship. These are the three demons you must slay if you wish to succeed..." — Mr. Burns

How does one become skilled in the combative arts? It's a question that has been debated for centuries, and the answer is so obvious that it can be elusive. Sure, everybody has a certain level of natural aptitude. Some people are naturally athletic. Others may have a more inherent understanding of body mechanics. These things can help someone on their quest to become a skilled martial artist, but in the end, there is one piece of the puzzle that is often missing: Sacrifice.

It's a word that gets thrown around a lot, so much so that it has come to be little more than an empty platitude. Usually, it is thrown in with a laundry-list of other empty platitudes like "hard work" and "focus".

People don't really dwell too much on what any of this really means, they just let these buzz words tumble around between their ears on the way to and from the studio.

But what does "sacrifice" really mean in terms of martial arts?

Attendance: It means never missing class. It means training when you are sick, tired, in pain, behind on your bills, stressed, have family in town, or when you are fighting with your spouse. Your goal, every class day, is to make it through the door no matter what.

Boundaries: It means letting everyone in your life know that the time you spend training is untouchable. This includes your spouse, girlfriend or boyfriend, boss, family, friends, and even your children. They'll resent you for it, and they'll really resent your training because of this. You must accept this and keep pushing forward.

Physical Pain: There will be the short-term pain that comes in the form of bruises, pulled muscles, sprains, split lips, and perhaps the occasional more serious injury. All of these, however, should be manageable. The long-term pain and injury is the real concern—and it's ever-looming if you are training hard. How often have you seen a professional boxer who looked spry in his later years? Combat arts will wreck your body. Aches, pains, and scars are just the beginning. Veterans of traditional, sport, and combatives martial arts all too frequently deal with bad hips, backs, shoulders, and knees. They are plagued by arthritis and joint damage. Head trauma or training accidents can do damage to one's vision. Grappling and boxing can both cause cauliflower ear and do damage to the hearing. Repeated impact to the skull can do neurological damage, including dementia pugilistica and pugilistic Parkinson's syndrome.

The Mental Aspect: The average person will go through their entire week without throwing or blocking a single punch. They'll give no thought to shattering someone's bones with a stick or piercing their

arteries with a blade. Martial artists, on the other hand, dwell on these things a lot. The more you sacrifice, the more your mind will be occupied with the art and science of destroying the human body. The more you dwell on this, the more you lose yourself.

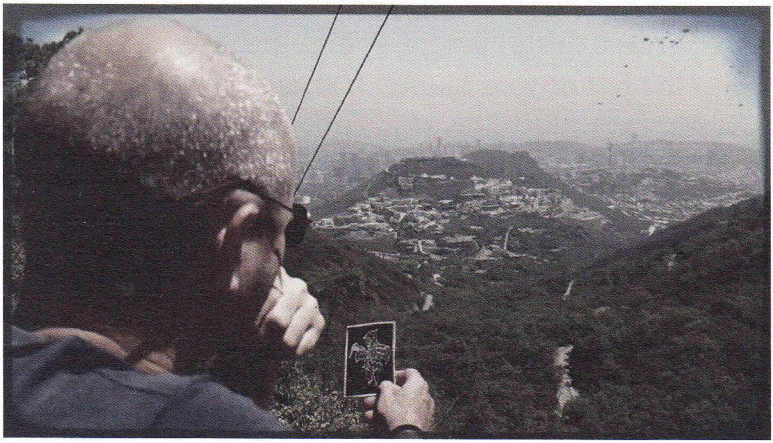
Those who make these sacrifices see the world through different eyes. Some would say that they see the world more clearly, others would argue that they see a skewed version of reality. But the obsessive martial artist will no doubt find their worldview altered by their training.

The bitter truth is that for many people—most people—the sacrifice needed to reach their true potential as a martial artist is just too steep. That's not a bad thing, and it doesn't mean that martial arts can't play a role in their lives — it just means they have other (arguably healthier) priorities. For those that do choose to walk the path of sacrifice, it's a long, difficult road. It's steep, unforgiving, and lonely. You'll question yourself and your motivations a thousand times, you'll ostracize your friends and family, and your career will suffer. The reward for this will be an alienated world view and a lot of pain dancing throughout your body later in life. All of this considered, the words of Charles Bukowski merit reading…

"If you're going to try, go all the way. Otherwise, don't even start. This could mean losing girlfriends, wives, relatives and maybe even your mind. It could mean not eating for three or four days. It could mean freezing on a park bench. It could mean jail. It could mean derision. It could mean mockery—isolation. Isolation is the gift. All the others are a test of your endurance, of how much you really want to do it. And, you'll do it, despite rejection and the worst odds. And it will be better than anything else you can imagine. If you're going to try, go all the way. There is no other feeling like that. You will be alone with the gods, and the nights will flame with fire. You will ride life straight to perfect laughter. It's the only good fight there is."

— *Charles Bukowski*

Thoughts on Mastery



What does it take to become a "Master" in the realm of martial arts? Nowadays, it's not incredibly difficult. Any combination of the following should be more than enough to earn this distinguished title:

- Time served. 6 to 10 years at most storefront martial arts schools will do.
- Learning a set number of techniques.
- Political alliances. Rubbing elbows with instructors of note can take you a long way.
- Money. Yes, mastership is for sale. In fact, it almost always comes with a price tag.

While those who are new to the world of martial arts may still believe that the title of Master implies some level of competence, those of us who have been around for a while know better. Most of the "Masters" I have encountered in recent years do little to invoke awe in the eyes of the discerning practitioner. Most are in their forties or fifties and grossly overweight, so much so that the ends of the belt that once hung proudly

from their waist has now been reduced to two tiny nubs protruding from a strained knot. They strut around the dojo, chest puffed out, hands clasped around their rank. Their students bow and grovel in class, and stroke their ego shamelessly before and after.

If you want to believe that's mastery, you are free to do so. Join the masses; grovel at the feet of your Master. Just know that it is far more likely that your Master achieved his rank through running in the right circles, and lining the right pockets, than through displaying exceptional martial abilities.

True Mastery, however, is something much different. What does it take to become a Master? There is an answer, and it doesn't just apply to martial arts. Studies have determined exactly what it takes to master anything. From chess, to computer programing, to Donkey Kong, to football, to martial arts… the requirement is the same:

10,000 hours of practice.

The book *Outliers* examined world-class experts as diverse as the Beatles, Bill Gates, and professional athletes. The one thing they all had in common was they trained in their respective crafts for 10,000 hours.

To put that into context, if your average martial artist attends 2-hour classes twice a week, and spends an additional 1-hour a week training on their own, in 10 years they will only have reached 2600 hours of practice, barely ¼ of the way to becoming a true Master. At this pace it will take over 38 years to reach the level of a real Master.

Training 10 hours a week, it will take close to 20 years. (this is 2 hours a day, 5 days a week.)

Training 20 hours a week it will take almost 10 years. (this is 4 hours a day, 5 days a week.)

If you think the 10,000 hours mark seems inflated, I can assure you it's not. How do I know? Because counting the hours I have spent training and teaching martial arts over the last three decades I myself have cracked the 10,000 hours mark, and I don't consider myself a Master. So, if anything, I would consider 10,000 hours low.

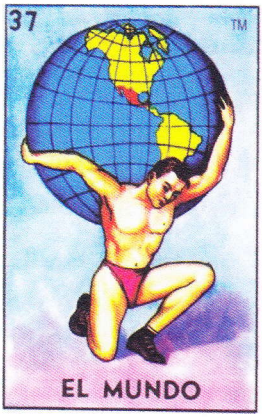
Furthermore, studies show that natural ability had very little to do with success compared to the 10,000 hours rule. More important than natural ability were various social and cultural circumstances that allowed these world-class experts to develop their abilities. But above all, it was the 10,000 hours of practice that mattered.

It's shameful that the martial arts industry, which has valued the title of "Master" for so long, has developed so many shortcuts to attain it. It has been cheapened. It has become a commodity that can be traded or purchased.

These days, when I see a Master, I can't help but wonder "Did they put in their 10,000+ hours? Or did they take the easy route? Did they really earn their title? Or did they buy it? Are they really a Master or are they just pretending?"

This is why Libre Fighting does not use the titles "Master" or "Grandmaster."

PART 3



THE CULTURE OF LIBRE FIGHTING

By design, Libre Fighting doesn't use a belt ranking system, or any system of progression found within any other martial art. The culture of Libre Fighting is meant to be unique in order to limit parallels being drawn between Libre Fighting and conventional martial arts. To understand this methodology, and appreciate the perspective it is taught from, one must try to limit connecting it to the dogma and traditions found elsewhere within the martial arts world. Libre Fighting does not use the uniforms, share the rituals, or adhere to the matters of etiquette commonly found in the martial arts. The culture found within Libre Fighting is wholly unique to this discipline.

LOTERÍA CARDS

The cards, and their use, have sparked a lot of speculation online. If you are at all familiar with this system, chances are you are at least somewhat familiar with this unique aspect of Libre Fighting.

Origins: These cards come from a game called "*Lotería*", a common bingo-style game in Mexican culture. In 2011, our Mexico Regional Director (Ed Calderón) began using these cards to create a sense of cultural connection between Libre Fighting and his Mexican students, ascribing specific cards to represent different elements of the Libre Fighting curriculum. This form of communication caught the eye of Libre practitioners everywhere.

This occurred at a point where Libre Fighting was gaining footholds all over the world, with practitioners speaking a multitude of different languages. We began to experiment with the idea of using the cards to create a Libre-specific language, that could be understood and used by all Libre practitioners who had the key to the cards meanings. What

evolved was a fairly sophisticated form of communication that has been used ever since.

Example: The Heart Card (El Corazón).

This is the only card meaning we share with the general public. The heart card is posted by practitioners on social media platforms as a sign of solidarity and shared suffering when a member of the Libre family is grieving or otherwise going through a particularly rough patch.

USAGE OF THE CARDS

1. Online Videos

The cards may be inserted into an online training videos to communicate aspects of the material being featured, or alternative applications not shown.

2. Seminars

Cards can be used in seminar promotion to let *The Initiated* know what material is being featured.

3. Photographs

A popular social media pastime for Libre practitioners is posting pictures of the weapons and gear they carry day-to-day. It has

become a trademark in certain areas of the world to include a Libre patch and related *Lotería* cards in these photos.

4. Signatures

A rite of passage Libre Fighting practitioners experience in their training involves being given a "signature" by their instructor. This signature is a set of three cards for intermediate-level practitioners, or two cards for advanced-level practitioners. Signatures are indicated by one card being turned upside down.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

"To punish me for my contempt for authority, fate made me an authority myself." – Albert Einstein

THE PATH TO INITIATION

NEW BLOOD - A New Blood is a student fresh off of the street. While not exactly a derogatory term, it is implied that New Bloods need to prove that they are serious about learning the discipline of Libre Fighting.

APPRENTICE - An apprentice is someone who has proven to us that they are serious and that they plan to stick around. There is no set number of techniques that need to be mastered to receive the title of Apprentice, no minimum amount of time spent training, nor is there a particular level of skill that must be achieved. The title of Apprentice is bestowed when we see a serious degree of commitment from the student.

INITIATED – Being initiated, also known as being "patched in", involves going through the first rite of passage. This takes place when a student has shown strides in learning the discipline of Libre Fighting, has demonstrated that they intend to make the study of Libre Fighting a long-term pursuit, and has demonstrated that they have the character to represent Libre Fighting in a respectable manner. As part of this rite of passage, a gray patch is awarded. This patch means the student has officially been accepted into the Libre Fighting Family. Most students receive their gray patch within eight to fourteen months of training,

however it is at the sole discretion of the instructor when a student is to be initiated.

THE ACOLYTE LEVEL

A student is recognized as an Acolyte when they have demonstrated proficiency in the mechanics of Libre Fighting and that they understand the concepts which govern the system. Acolytes are expected to be able to adapt techniques to various situations and show the ability to apply the discipline of Libre Fighting effectively in uncontrolled scenarios.

Being awarded the title of Acolyte involves a second rite of passage in which the students three card signature is revealed to them.

Acolytes may serve as assistant instructors in class or during seminars.

THE MENTOR LEVEL

A student is recognized as a Mentor when they have demonstrated that they not only possess the ability to utilize Libre Fighting teachings, but can also clearly share those principles with others. There is no rite of passage involved with this recognition, rather it is the cumulation of experience gained through teaching Libre Fighting under the supervision of their Mentor.

Mentors are awarded a yellow patch, and may serve as Chapter Heads or Trainers.

THE EMISSARY LEVEL

An Emissary is someone who has taken on the responsibility of helping to spread Libre Fighting beyond their own chapter. This may include teaching seminars outside of their chapter, or supervising multiple Chapter Heads in areas that are particularly saturated, to prevent Chapters from stepping on one another's toes.

Emissaries are awarded a Blue Patch and may serve as Sub Regional Directors.

THE DISCIPLE LEVEL

Disciples are the leading exponents of Libre Fighting. A Disciple is expected to be highly adept at all of the mechanics and applications found in Libre Fighting, and be able to effectively teach the Libre Fighting curriculum to both beginners and advanced students. Disciples are the leading voices within the Libre

Fighting structure, and often supervise training in entire countries or regions.

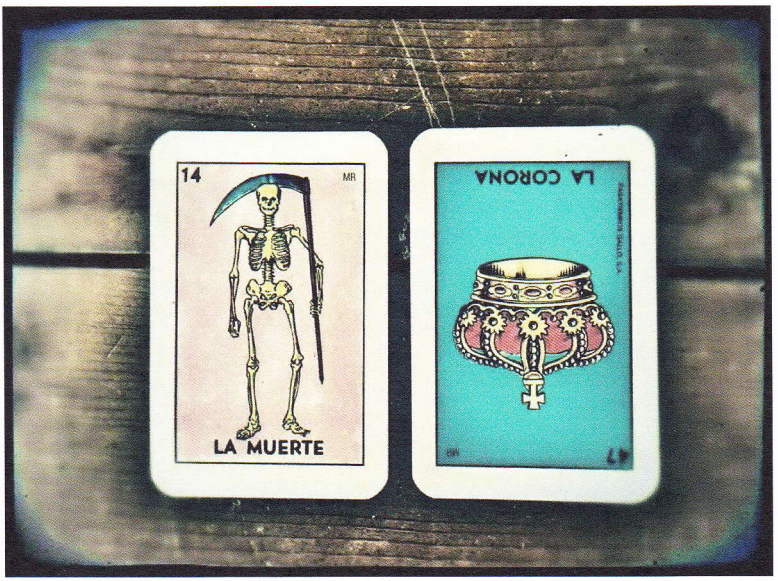
Disciples are awarded a red patch, and may serve as Regional Directors.

HONORS

THE CHALLENGE COIN

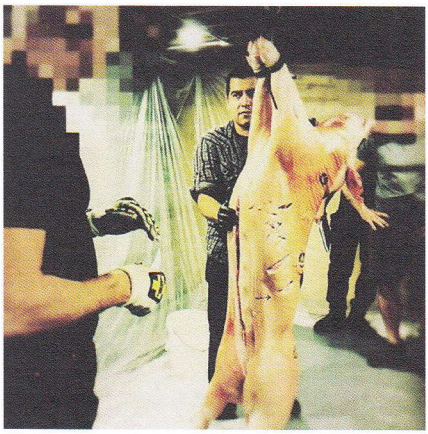
Challenge coins are given out as a sign of appreciation to Libre Fighting practitioners who go above and beyond in helping to build or share Libre Fighting. Challenge coins may be awarded to anybody who has officially been patched in.

MASTER DISCIPLE



The highest honor awarded in Libre Fighting is the title of Master Disciple. A Disciple may be recognized as a Master Disciple after years of study and contribution as a Disciple.

A special word of thanks to Ed Calderón for providing several photos used in this work.



For over a decade Ed Calderón worked in the fields of counter narcotics, organized crime investigation, and public safety in the northern-border region of Mexico. During this period, he also coordinated and worked executive protection details for high-level government officials and visiting dignitaries — often in some of the most dangerous parts of the country.

Ed Calderon's study of indigenous Mexican criminal culture, from occult practices to endemic *modus operandi* have lead him to be recognized as one of the world's preeminent researchers and trainers in the field of personal security that has ever come out of Mexico. Ed has had the privilege of sharing his expertise with members of federal law enforcement agencies like the FBI, U.S. Marshals, and military units like the US Navy SEALS, Indonesian KOPASKA, Mexican GAFE, as well as intelligence service agents, and members of special forces groups from all over the world.

Currently, Ed travels throughout North America doing security consulting and conducting seminars and private training courses in anti-abduction, escapology, unarmed combat, region specific executive protection work, and unconventional edged weapons work. He is also a Chief Curriculum Advisor for Libre Fighting Systems, the Regional Director of Libre Fighting Systems in Mexico, and a founding member of the Calidus Collective.

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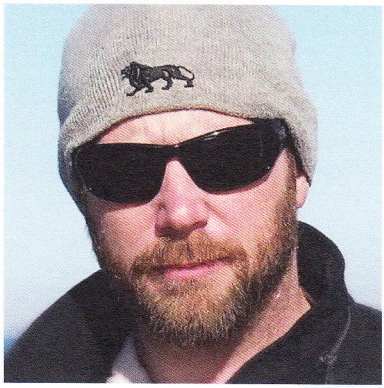

Scott Babb is a lifelong martial artist, a leading voice on the subject of knife combatives, and the founder of Libre Fighting; arguably the most widely recognized knife-based system in the world today.

He is an author, blogger, and the co-designer of the Kramer Custom Knives Libre Fighter MKII. His work has been featured on Vice.com, the UFC YouTube Channel, and CNN Indonesia. His work has also been seen in Blade Magazine, Tactical Knives Magazine, and Recoil Concealment Magazine.

Libre Fighting is currently being taught in 16 countries and is trained by military, special forces, executive protection teams, law enforcement, and intelligence units all over the world.

Additionally, he is the author of Finding Libre – My Life in the Martial Arts, runs the blog Cicatrices at www.Scott-Babb.com, and has produced a successful line of instructional materials.